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The Great One

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*The Great Ones*

THE LOVE STORY OF TWO  
VERY IMPORTANT PEOPLE

*by*

RALPH INGERSOLL

*New York*

HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY

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*To My Son*



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## *The Great Ones*



*Letia's Mother Gives Her to the Public*

SHE WAS CHRISTENED Letitia Long. The family simplified Letitia to something that sounded like *Leash-ya*—and she herself then chose to spell her name Letia. After she became famous, few things irritated her more than its mispronunciation.

Letia's father was a moderately successful lawyer who was also an accomplished amateur painter. He lived in Morristown, New Jersey, and drew his income from a big New York firm. Letia was his only child and he died in 1918 when she was ten years old. Letia was very interested in what he would look like dead, but when she tiptoed in to where her father lay, she found the silver-plated handles to the coffin more exciting. They reflected the lights from the candles and were very beautiful. She wanted to draw a picture of them.

Letia didn't realize how satisfying it was to her that her father was dead until she felt her pleasure in the coffin handles. Then she knew that his death was her personal triumph, because she was sure that she had killed him. She had killed him by kicking him in the stomach. The following summer he had fallen ill and now, only six months later, he was dead of something the matter with his stomach which they wouldn't explain to Letia, but they didn't need to because she knew.

Letia hadn't been sure whether she'd done a wise thing in killing him. She couldn't remember what he'd done that had made her so angry. Something. When she'd been very, *very* little, she'd adored him. She'd lie in bed listening for his steps on the stairs each evening. She'd hold her breath to make it stiller and she would tremble all over with the suspense. She could smell him in the room long after he'd kissed her good night and gone—smell tobacco and the soap he used to wash his hands. It was called "4711." Letia couldn't remember, standing by his coffin, when all this had changed. It was his own fault, she suddenly thought. Or maybe it wasn't. Maybe it was her mother's.

Letia caught her breath and fear flooded into her. Her mother was so strong and so beautiful and did everything

so easily. Her mother made people laugh or cry, just as she pleased. It would have been better to have killed her mother, but that was unthinkable. Mother couldn't be killed by any old kick in the stomach. Mother was indestructible and had eyes that could see right through you.

Letia began to cry, silently. The crying became so intense that she shook all over. Oh, damn her, damn her, *damn her!* There was some connection between what she felt about her mother and the reason why she had made her father dead, but all chance of finding it was gone now because the terror had enveloped her. Her hand went out and she touched the silver symbol of her triumph. It was cold and shiny hard. She clung to it and her knees gave way and she could not breathe at all. She was going to die—as she should die, in the awful pain of terror, for the terrible thing she had done.

Afterwards the family used to tell the story of finding little Letia there, by her dead father's bier, clinging to the handle of his coffin, shaken with grief at his death. Poor little Letia; she'd loved her father so. Always speak to her as if he were still alive, they said. It reminds her of him and softens the pain of his loss. At least she has her dear mother. Have you ever seen a child so anxious to please her mother, so obedient?

In her teens, you could tell that Letia was going to be extraordinary. Her legs were long and thin and her skin was already a translucent new-snow white with just the faintest of rose color glowing through it. The outlines of her face were as clean and symmetrical and sharply chiseled as if they had been cut in some very fine-grained stone. Already she couldn't miss being extraordinary to look at. But her looks were never going to be the only unusual thing about Letia.

It was not just that she had the quality of leadership. Letia led her classmates effortlessly, captained this team, coached that, turned thumbs down or up on each new pupil as naturally as if she'd been young royalty in a school of commoners—loyal commoners who appreciated the prerogatives of blood. But born leaders in their teens often cast such spells—and end as factory foremen. Letia's uniqueness was that she played the most active of roles among her schoolmates

and still spent long hours alone, wholly self-sufficient, often locked in her neat little room, absorbed with things that were going on inside her.

What these things were is not very interesting. They did not concern the searching of the soul. Their manifestations were practical, realistic, ambitious acts—like teaching herself things that weren't taught in her school, like trying to learn to draw things as well as her father used to draw the pictures he made just for her, like buying and mastering books that teach a stenographer's trade, stenography being one road to freedom through self-support.

Being only a growing girl, with most of her energy still going into bone and muscle, she did not at first master any of her activities very thoroughly. But her drive was a thing to comment on—her drive, her self-sufficiency, and her practical thoughtfulness.

After Letia's father died, Letia's mother moved to a smaller house. She spent the income from a considerable sum of insurance on clothes and keeping herself pretty. When Letia was fifteen, her mother was married a second time—to a broker who was a good deal younger than she. Letia never envied her mother the broker. He was a quiet, conventional man with whom she got on civilly, but he could not warm or chill her the way her father once had. All Letia was conscious of was an overwhelming desire to grow up and to go away from her mother and her mother's home.

Once Letia asked herself what growing up meant but could find no satisfactory answer. Thoughtfully, she enumerated what grown-ups could do and concluded that there was nothing in the inventory which was beyond her. This was when she was fifteen. Of course there were some things she was not allowed to do, like going out alone at night to spend her own money in restaurants, but she felt she would be quite adequate if she had the opportunity.

Sex still interested Letia only academically. Once she decided she should know what boys looked like naked so, quite logically, she got on a train and traveled to New York where she found her answer in the Metropolitan Museum. (Letia never turned to books for knowledge.) She'd been taken to the Museum several times in the past but had never noticed before. She was not moved by what she saw now, only a little embarrassed that people might guess why she

was there. Riding back to the station she was irritated that she felt guilty. The guiltiness, and the irritation with it, persisted for a while, but principally she felt relieved that her sex education was finally complete. There was nothing more that anyone could tell her about males, and one more mystery had been removed from life. Letia never liked mysteries.

At that period, Letia regarded boys simply as competitors, principally for money. Money Letia definitely wanted—mostly money she had earned herself so that she would not have to ask her mother for it. Asking her mother for money, even to buy school books, brought confusing emotions, mostly angry. Since her mother didn't think it nice for Letia to work in the drug store after school, Letia had to earn her money in secret. In her playtime hours, and in other parts of town, she had to enter the more competitive fields of hand-bill distributing, setting up pins in a downtown bowling alley, shoveling snow or mowing lawns according to the season. Here boys definitely got in her hair, and once she had to attack one physically, flailing him with her long arms and legs, biting, scratching, and spitting before she succeeded in imposing her will on him. It was an incident in her brief career as a newsboy. He had tried to stop her from operating on his corner.

When she had conquered, Letia refused to let her battered opponent run away. Instead she made him stay to carry her big bundle of newspapers while she sold them for profit. His tears did not move her.

It never occurred to either mother or daughter that Letia's knack with a pencil could support her; she drew only for her own amusement. During her junior year in high school, Letia had been instructed in painting. She had been taught how to use oils, and Miss Roget, the tired old spinster who conducted the class, had been excited by Letia's facility. The colors Letia used were bold and positive; her designs were precise and carefully thought out. She had a flair for likeness which showed in the two portraits she did. But Letia's instructress was never able to interest her star pupil in making a career of art. It was too obvious to Letia that Miss Roget's own rewards had been too meager.

Letia's idea of how to get on in the world was to get a job which paid real money right away—a job like a stenogra-

pher's, which might start at as much as twenty-five dollars a week. A few years of savings in dollars rather than cents and Letia was certain she would be independent. With that independence, she would travel—to reassure herself that the rest of the world was no harder to master than Morristown, New Jersey.

Letia was seventeen before she lost her confidence that she knew all life's answers. She had a savings bank account of over two hundred dollars, was about to graduate from high school with the longest biography in the yearbook, and had been using a lipstick with impersonal neatness for several years. Her shorthand, now school taught, was precise and rapid, and her mother had agreed that next year she might skip college and apply for a position with some local firm.

Then one day, for no reason she could understand, she asked the boy she'd beaten on the street corner so long ago to spend the evening with her at home. His name was Horace and he had a square, homely face and wore his older brother's clothes which were still too big for him. He had large hands and his hair stood straight up in a pompadour.

From time to time other boys had tried to kiss Letia, but their efforts had been half-hearted because Letia was so obviously disinterested. As for Horace, he was much too frightened of Letia even to think of holding her hand. Letia sat him on a sofa next to her and produced an album of photographs to hold his attention. Letia's mother and the broker were at a movie. Letia had never talked much to Horace, who had simply belonged to her, like her portable Remington or the silver-backed comb which her stepfather had given her. Now, suddenly, she found herself in an almost hysterically conversational mood. She talked Horace into a state of complete confusion—about nothing—and then suddenly fell silent. She felt very strange. She wanted to look at Horace. She wanted to look and look at him, but she could not raise her eyes from the album that lay open across their laps, one end of which he grasped with his big hand. Suddenly she felt Horace's shoulder against hers, felt the flesh of his shoulder, through his brother's outgrown suit and the jersey she wore.

Letia could feel the color coming up the back of her neck and spreading through her cheeks. Impulsively, she turned toward Horace. She took him in both her arms and held him

against her. She tried to kiss him, but she was too excited to untangle their noses and Horace had been caught with an arm up, straightening his necktie. His free hand waved helplessly right in the way. Letia let go of him and now took his waving paw and kissed it with passion. Then she got up and stood there looking down at him. She felt awful. She wanted to run and she wanted to stay. Then her inadequacy overcame her and she burst into tears.

Horace went out with the album still clutched in the other hand and had to return it the next day. He was careful to choose an hour when he was reasonably certain Letia would not be there.

After the affair of Horace and the album, Letia had a lot of thinking to do. Obviously she was in love with Horace, and now she knew what all that talk—and all the things she saw people do in the movies—was about. She was not sure she liked it, but she kept wanting to see Horace again and at the same time being afraid to see him. Painstakingly, she took her experience apart and examined the pieces. First, it didn't matter whether she liked the sensations or not, she had them. They were part of her. Since they were part of her, they had to be accommodated. Second, the trouble was with Horace. If Horace had acted less like a clown, the experience might even have been pleasant. But Horace *was* a clown and that was that. She would either have to shake the clown out of Horace or begin all over again. When Horace was visibly anxious not to tarry with her after school, Letia decided he wasn't worth beating a second time. She decided she didn't love him any more.

She began to look at herself in a mirror.

As soon as Letia began really to look at herself in her mirror, a whole new horizon opened up. For no reason she could explain, boys—all kinds of boys, whom she had known for years, in school and around town—began to ask her to do things with them—to skate, to go to the movies, to come to parties. She no longer needed to earn money to pay for tickets or sodas—or even for transportation. Moreover, the most interesting thing happened. She found that all she had to do to make a boy obedient to her will was to look at him. Why, oh why, she asked herself, hadn't someone told her before? Moreover, she *liked* looking at boys. Once in a

while, so looking, she felt uncomfortable—a little the way she had with Horace that night—but not often. Mostly it was just fun, leaving behind it not confusion but a sense of exhilaration, of mastery over something.

One senior in high school whom Letia had known all her life was a boy named Hugo. Hugo was two years older and she had never thought much of him because she was so much brighter than he. Letia had, however, avoided competing with Hugo for jobs because he was so much bigger than she and had an easy self-assurance based on the fact that he was a basketball hero. The odds had been against her so Letia had left him alone.

After Letia had been going with boys for a few months, she decided she'd been wrong about Hugo. Brains weren't everything, and there was something about the way people said hello to Hugo that made it pleasant to be with him. He got respect without either brains or looking at himself in mirrors.

Letia annexed Hugo quite easily because by now she was pretty all over, from her slim ankles to her ash-blonde wavy bobbed hair. She was already right on the edge of being a beauty and people turned to watch her walk past. She was a logical adornment for a basketball hero and Hugo had a keen sense of the fitting. He was also a very adequate, if somewhat inexperienced, young male. Letia's well-established reputation for being untouchable was a challenge to him.

After Letia and Hugo had been to a dozen dances and birthday parties together, they became engaged. Both of them took this step for granted. At seventeen, in Morris-town, an engagement regularized things without committing anyone. After commencement, Hugo arranged to have Letia and himself asked to an aunt's summer place on Cape Cod for a long week end. Since he was about to go abroad with his family, and to return thence to Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, this week end would be his and Letia's farewell. The rules were that they would then correspond for a while, until one or the other made a new and more convenient connection. At no time had either of them shown any signs of falling in love with the other. They were both too busy growing.

Now, however, it was early summer, and the distractions of

graduation were over. Letia had begun to think again. She thought that in laughing and playing with boys she had found the beginnings of a pleasant road through life. But it was already unsatisfying. She wanted a lot more, but she had no idea what it might be. Soon she would have to find out because her feelings were becoming so intense they were frightening. She felt the power of the drive within her—a huge, unremitting restlessness. She felt her ability to master life. She was already aware of how much better fitted she was to direct, and to have power, than any of the adults she knew.

There was also, Letia recognized, that not-quite-disposed-of problem of sex. It had not really bothered her since she'd found that just being around boys was enough for the moment. Somewhere along the line she'd also discovered that, purely and simply as a practical matter, she got more by refusing than by giving—even a casual kiss. To Hugo this had been irritating, but to have the prettiest girl in school as a "fiancée" was enough for the moment, and in the spring Hugo played baseball *and* trained for track. But now, with his energies released too, Hugo was changing. He was becoming hard to handle.

Letia went on thinking.

She might, she thought, just as well get it over with. Maybe, as had been the case with Horace, even though it wouldn't be pleasant, it would do important things to her. Maybe it would lead to new sources of pleasure and power. Besides it was something that had to be done sometime. You can't be a virgin all your life, she assured herself.

The second day on the Cape, Hugo's uncle offered to let Hugo sail the catboat alone. Hugo's aunt had lunch packed in a basket for them, and Hugo and Letia set sail. Hugo wore only his dark blue bathing trunks and the lines of his rangy sun-browned body reminded Letia of the lines of the hips and shoulders of the Grecian statues in the Museum. But Hugo's limbs were alive and exciting and made her feel alive and exciting too. Sitting so that she leaned against the center-board box, looking up at him silhouetted against the sky, Letia became aware of her own body and *its* shape. She knew how it looked in its trim white bathing suit, how it looked to Hugo when he glanced down from the sea and the sail.

After a while Hugo stood up and loosened the halyard and let the canvas flutter and crackle down. He furled it very

carefully. He took a line and fastened down the tiller. The water was very calm and the catboat rocked gently, making little lapping sounds. Hugo was meticulous about making everything in the boat shipshape. He took a long time about it. The shore was a thin wavy line. There were no other boats nearer than the horizon.

Finally Hugo came and sat down next to her, tilting the boat, and she could smell the fresh brownness of his skin. She had made her decision the night before. But it wasn't unpleasant at all; not really; only very strange. Neither did she feel ashamed, as she had after Horace. Just grown up. Hugo looked as if *he* felt a little ashamed. He looked as if he were upset by conflicting emotions. Letia had no sense of conflict at all. She felt very kindly feelings toward Hugo. And a vague disappointment.

Hugo didn't want to go abroad with his family after the week end on the Cape, but Letia sent him away with them. She had a lot more to think about. One of the things she wanted to think about alone was how Hugo's attitude had changed after that Sunday. She'd never felt he really belonged to her before. She'd known her possession of him had been temporary. But the night before he sailed, Hugo sat across a night club table from her, and from the way he looked at her she knew something had happened to him. He wasn't able to talk, either—Hugo, who used to chatter so! And his hand trembled once when he touched hers.

Letia felt no emotion that night that could have called forth such symptoms as these. So she couldn't analyze them. But she saw clearly that whatever it was that made Hugo look at her like that also made him belong to her in a way no one else had ever belonged to her. And, intuitively, she felt that it had not to do solely with whatever had happened physically between them or she would have felt what he felt. And she didn't.

Letia now decided that she'd been quite right to do what she'd done. Like that first fluttering with Horace, her day at sea with Hugo was indeed going to open up new avenues to whatever it was she wanted out of life. Now she had better begin to make up her mind what that would be. She was getting on. She was almost eighteen.

When Letia got back to Morristown, her stepfather eyed her curiously. She looked radiant, but she was unusually restless.

"Letia's not going to marry Hugo," the broker said to her mother later.

"You never thought she would," said Letia's mother.

Her husband drummed on the table with his fingers.

"I thought they might fall in love," he said. "Young people do, you know. But Letia isn't in love."

"Not Letia," said her mother. "When she was a little girl she was crazy about her father, but I don't think she's ever loved anyone since." She paused. "She loves Letia," she added.

"She's a very beautiful girl, your daughter," said the broker.

"Not to you, darling," said his wife. "I've been thinking about Letia. I'm not so sure about that secretary business. I think she's pretty enough to go on the stage. It's what I wanted once. I never wanted her to go to college but I think we might be able to find a good dramatic school for her in New York. We'll go to her opening night, and drink champagne in her dressing room afterwards. Then you and I will take a long trip—without Letia."

The broker laughed.

"Nobody with sense would fall in love with Letia," he said. "She's too self-sufficient. It would just hurt to love that young lady—and not have her need anything you could give her."

"Stepfathers who speculate on what it would be like to fall in love with their beautiful stepdaughters are not admirable characters," said his wife. "I've seen Letia coming a long time. Tomorrow we will give her to the public together. I'm very fond of her but I shall shed no tears."

Letia was very favorably impressed with the students of the dramatic school in which her mother enrolled her. None of the girls was either as bright or as pretty as she. She would have no difficulty whatever in competing with them, even though she was only eighteen. The men in the school were a little old—some, she thought, must be almost thirty—but it would be interesting to find out what they had to offer. It was obvious that she could have all or any part of their attention. She did not at all resent Mr. Hicks, the proprietor of the school, telling her that she would have

to do something about her hair and her clothes right away if she didn't care to specialize in hill-billy parts. He had spent too long looking at her before he said anything at all.

The new experiences at the theatrical school were interesting, but Letia thought only of how soon she could put them behind her. She was quite through with school, even with schooling that led to something as glamorous as a stage career. The way to manage that kind of a problem was to handle it quickly and well, and get it over with.

*Sturges Eludes the Bishop*

WHEN STURGES STRONG was confirmed in the Episcopal faith, there was, of course, a bishop presiding. The bishop and Sturges met in St. James' Church on New York's Madison Avenue in the year of our Lord, 1920. Sturges was twelve. After the bishop had spoken the words and laid his hands upon the bowed young heads, it was his custom to ask a question or two of one of those newly entered into his church. This year it chanced to be Sturges.

"What prayers do you say, my child?" he asked.

Young Sturges looked the bishop in the eye and answered that every evening after he had said the Lord's Prayer, he repeated appropriate appeals which he himself had written during the afternoon. He said he wrote his prayers after the play period which followed the end of classes in school. Sturges went on to explain that he sought to feel God's attitude toward him at the moment and to write something consistent with it.

The bishop was so impressed that he wrote Sturges' father strongly advocating that the latter consider educating his son in the church.

Mr. Strong was pleased that his son had attracted the bishop's attention, but he did not follow the latter's advice. His son Sturges, Mr. Strong decided, could serve God better as a layman. There were plenty of godly men in the clergy already, he told the bishop; what the world needed was more respect for the Deity among those who wore their collars the right way round.

The Strong—father, son, and two daughters—lived in the upper east side of Manhattan Island, and Mr. Strong was engaged at the time in the erection of another large bridge which would connect Manhattan with Long Island. He had been a bridge engineer all his life. Having had much to do with the politicians who caused bridges to be built, Engineer Strong had long since become convinced that God's truth had to be defended from such men. The association of God

with the clean lines of the suspension cable was very real to him, and so was the influence of the Devil on the profession of bridge building. It was the Devil, in a succession of frock coats, who nagged at him to cheapen his specifications, to place his bridges not where they belonged but where the most real estate profit to insiders would result, or tried to bully him into giving his contracts to firms he considered unworthy.

To Strong, Sr., righteousness needed champions nowhere more than in the construction of bridges, on whose integrity human lives depended. He did not want Sturges to be an engineer himself—engineering was too thankless a profession—but he thought his son might well be brought up to pay the engineer the respect that was due him. It would be wonderful if Sturges went into politics and succeeded in getting something built the way it should be built.

Young Sturges, whose mother had died in his early childhood, absorbed his father's high moral standards by osmosis. They came to him through his pores, and at twelve he was many years away from questioning them. He never questioned any of his father's values because, for one thing, he was much too frightened of his parent. Strong, Sr., was a big man and a positive one. He was used to roaring at workmen across the windy spaces of a suspension bridge and he could not modulate his voice below a rasp. Moreover, Sturges' father did everything too perfectly for Sturges to aspire to imitate him, as most small boys seek to imitate their fathers.

Made bitterly aware of his own imperfections, Sturges sought refuge in religion.

Being actually just as thorough by nature as his father, Sturges went about building his religious faith exactly the same way his father went about building bridges. And he was just as jealous of his structure's living up to specifications.

Sturges was aware, for instance, that when he knelt in his pajamas by his opened window on a winter night he often got uncomfortably cold. He always made himself kneel by an open window because to kneel on the soft carpet by the bed was so comfortable as to be almost disrespectful of God. But when he got very cold, kneeling by the window, he found that despite himself he had a tendency to speed up his prayers. He could feel his body unconsciously tensing for the quick spring back across the room in under the warm

covers. So at the end of every prayer, after the Amen, Sturges made himself wait and count to fifty as slowly as he could, just to make clear to his selfish flesh that he would take no nonsense from it.

Neither Sturges' father nor his older sisters knew of Sturges' habits of prayer, for his faith was a very secret thing. The bishop's letter had, in fact, come as a surprise to the family because until then they had not known that Sturges took his religious education seriously enough to impress anyone. He showed no trace of his inner invisible faith at the private school he went to just off Park Avenue in the Sixties. There he was aggressive, practical, literal-minded, and self-confident. Not even his best friends knew how terribly frightened he was of God and how much he wanted to please Him.

When Sturges was thirteen, his father and his older sisters had a conference on whether to send him to boarding school and decided against it. Sturges had sprouted from a dumpy, fat little boy to a disjointed collection of arms and knees and was almost six feet tall already. Sturges' own announcement that he wanted to go to boarding school so that he could play football was what finally decided his family against sending him. They all agreed that he had grown too fast for football to be a safe sport for him. The idea of football being dangerous had been put in their heads by a series of highly publicized injuries the fall before.

The Strong's decision not to send Sturges away to boarding school left him a big frog in the small puddle that was the Lehigh Private Classes for Young Gentlemen. This fashionable little school was equipped only to educate the young between the ages of six and twelve, but its headmaster was adequate to the opportunity to take in a few extra hundred dollars a year. He agreed to go on teaching Sturges.

The special tutoring was spectacularly successful. When Sturges was only fifteen, he began his study of first-year trigonometry at 7 o'clock on the evening of the day the term began and finished it on midnight of the same day. By that hour he had read the whole book and done all the problems. If his sisters had been as religious as Sturges, they would probably have crossed themselves at this exhibition. The finishing schools they had already graduated from had

barely taught them how to read and write, and they would never master even the relatively simple arithmetic of a check-book.

His diligence being unusual, Sturges could have been ready for college when he was sixteen, but after another family conference, instructions were issued to slow up his rate of education. It was agreed that there should not be too big a gap between his age and the age of his classmates in New Haven.

During the years that Sturges lived with his father and sisters before he went to Yale, no communications of importance passed between them. Strong, Sr., continued to build bridges and to stave off politicians, and Sturges' sisters were introduced into polite society at modest coming-out parties in their own house. Sturges gained some knowledge of the world, however, by hiding himself behind the portieres in the library and listening to his sisters' beaux paying court.

What went on around him was not as clear as trigonometry. He was curious but unimpressed. Like an anthropologist studying the antics of savages, he observed his sisters bringing young men home to giggle with them and making fudge in a chafing dish. The living that Sturges did was inside himself and did not require props or people. The problem in his life was to find and fulfill the faith in God of which he knew he was capable but which was so pure and wonderful and awful that he still could not discuss it with anyone.

Toward the end of his adolescence this yearning for an undefinable faith became to Sturges almost unbearable. But there was still nothing the boy could do about it except to write his own prayers and pray them. All the people he knew, he knew too slightly or too well for him to discuss such things with them. In school there were only the still younger boys with whom he was now thrown. None of his masters had the character to break through to challenge him, and no new people came into his life.

Sturges' last years at home were filled, emotionally, with a growing anxiety and hope for what he would find when he was at last grown, and away from all this, and at the university. The very last year before he went to Yale, he even stopped praying. He felt it was futile to go on searching by himself with no one wiser and of greater faith to guide him.

Sturges Strong arrived in New Haven still in schoolboy

clothes already well outgrown. Coming alone and without benefit of classmates from a preparatory school, his social assets were speaking acquaintanceships with no more than half a dozen boys whom he had met when they were in New York, on vacation from St. Paul's and St. Mark's. His lack of friends, however, did not concern Sturges. He had an outward self-assurance given him by his towering leadership of the little group he had left. It was buttressed by an awareness that his brain was adequate to his environment.

It was with a confident step that he left the registrar's office to begin his adventures.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Letia Falls in Love*

IT WAS 1925 when Sturges Strong went to Yale. Even if Letia Long had known him at the time, and he'd been a much more prepossessing character than he was as a boy, it is doubtful if he would have appealed to her then. Letia was not yet eighteen, but it was her destiny to skip college boys as well as college. She had begun her studies at Mr. Hicks' Academy of the Theater in September and she was almost immediately thrown in contact with a post-graduate world.

Within a year of her matriculation, Letia could have been mistaken for twenty-eight. She was a very sophisticated young lady indeed. Besides her winter of study in New York, she now had a summer with a stock company behind her as well. She had over two thousand dollars in the bank, too. Most of this money had come from her mother, acquired by the simple device of banking all but a few dollars of a generous allowance. It was not so much that Letia misrepresented her needs as that she failed to make clear that her roommate paid the rent. As often as not, her roommate also provided the party clothes, being herself repaid by invitations to make a fourth at luncheons or dinners where neither girl paid anything. (Letia always borrowed the quarter she gave the attendant in the powder room.)

Letia's roommate the year she spent at Hicks' was a girl named Dorothy Palmer whose father owned an automobile sales agency in Kansas City, Missouri. Dorothy was at Hicks' for fun and to look for a husband. The alliance which Letia offered her after they had known each other only a few weeks materially broadened her prospects of success in both enterprises, for Dorothy was an undistinguished little girl with no flair at all for city life. Letia had spelled out the arrangement to her, making no bones of her own objectives, which were to save money and to have an ally in the Battle of the Sexes, a junior partner who could be easily manipulated.

Dorothy remained in Letia's life for almost a year, during which time Letia more than fulfilled her share of the bargain.

She kept Dorothy from marrying three wrong men, wisely persuaded her to give up acting (for which she had so little talent), and sent her back to Kansas City still almost a virgin and just in time to pick up a girlhood beau on the rebound. Dorothy remained grateful to Letia all her life and was personally hurt by the malicious attitude so much of the world took after Letia became famous. Letia herself remained sentimental about Dorothy; her secretaries always remembered to send Dorothy flowers on the anniversaries of her wedding.

Letia had advised Dorothy to give up acting, but she did not abandon the stage herself, despite the fact that she had little more talent than her roommate. At school and in summer stock in Millbrook, Letia made herself into a professional by intelligence and hard work, simply because she was sure she could earn more money as an actress than as the stenographer she'd first been trained to be, and because failure would continue her dependence on her mother. When, in the fall of 1926, she got her first part in a Broadway show—at fifty dollars a week for fifteen minutes a night and two matinees—she felt free of Morristown at last. She did not, however, suggest that her two hundred dollars a month from home be discontinued.

Dorothy went back to Kansas City in December, leaving the rent on their brownstone walk-up in West 53rd Street paid up to the following October first. The best friend Letia had left was Orlando Hicks himself, whose Hicks' Academy of the Theater Letia was supposed to go on attending through another winter.

Letia had never slept with Orlando, although he had asked her to bed with him often enough. He owned his business but he was really a newspaper man who had been a juvenile actor once. For fifteen years he'd been a city news reporter, and then his paper had been merged out from under him. That catastrophe had sent him back to the theater to make his living. There he had hung out his shingle as a dramatic coach simply because it seemed more original to him than becoming a press agent. That had been in the early years of the boom and enough stagestruck young people had turned up to keep him in the racket. He was no worse than most.

Letia never took Orlando's love-making seriously, and perhaps he didn't either. He was thirty-eight, fat and frowzy, and looked as if he slept in his clothes—which he frequently did,

on his own casting couch, when he was just too lazy to make the effort required to catch the last train to his suburban home. Orlando's home was in Garden City and he had a wife there who played bridge. He was good-natured, unambitious, no fool. He even had a hobby, which was collecting the biographies of generals.

Orlando Hicks had never known a general, or been a soldier, but he was fascinated by generals. He was general-struck, the way most of his pupils were stagestruck. What fascinated him was the arbitrary power which he felt they had, the power of life and death over friend and foe. Generals' lives also appealed to him for their theatrical trappings, and the generals Hicks liked least were the modest ones who posed as being no better than their soldiers.

It was undoubtedly Orlando's love of generals which really attracted him to Letia, attracted him as a whole human being and not simply as a male. Letia, Orlando was shrewd enough to perceive, had the true qualities he most admired in military men.

She had personal authority, independent of rank. She knew her superiority, assumed it so thoroughly, in fact—even in her late teens—that she never troubled to assert it needlessly. Her mind worked objectively; there was remarkably little female shilly-shally about her. At the same time, she was anything but a mannish young woman. She was herself, frankly a superior human being, born to command. So Orlando Hicks did his best to "read" her, to study her as he would the early chapters in the biography of a general, seeking, in the clues of the apprentice, the secret of the master he was sure she'd be. He asked her to sleep with him only out of politeness and to remind himself that he was a man.

Letia didn't sleep with anybody for the whole first year she knew Orlando—while she was going to his school and immediately after she left it. She had no particular urge to; she had learned all she felt she needed to know from Hugo. Hugo himself had offered no temptation on his return from Europe. Half an hour after they had known each other, in the swaying security of the little catboat, Letia had outgrown her first lover. She did not invite him back into her life. At Orlando Hicks' Academy she had established again the reputation she'd had in high school of being unapproachable. It was well known, in the West 50's, that Orlando himself

hadn't made the grade even though he came to be seen with Letia almost nightly.

Orlando and Dorothy, before she left for home, were Letia's two shields, which she used alternately. The man whose lance was most often broken on one or the other was Randolph Phelps. Randolph Phelps was Yale '21, Westbury, Long Island, Brooks Brothers, Racquet and Tennis—and the income from sixty million poorly invested dollars. His great grandfather had married a few hundred thousand of these dollars and bought real estate on Manhattan with them. Time and timidity (about selling anything) had multiplied them. Much of the original Phelps' acreage was now stranded between the more valuable territories of lower and mid-Manhattan, but it still brought in its 2 per cent from which Randolph's bills were paid by his father's estate.

Randolph was an only child. He was an affable young man, not very bright, and the nearest thing to a philosophy which he had acquired in twenty-seven years was that the rich had an obligation to appreciate the beautiful. His mother, who collected eighteenth-century English furniture, was responsible for this. Later in life, Randolph would become a patron of modern French and even modern American painting, but in his twenties Randolph's taste in beauty still ran to race horses and women. He would have liked to own stables of both, but he didn't feel nearly rich enough after he paid the feed bill for his horses and the bets he lost on them. Since he had the family timidity about possessing things to which he did not own clear title, Randolph fulfilled his obligation to appreciate beauty in women from respectful distances. Letia was the first woman whom Randolph *knew* he wanted to own.

Randolph met Letia at a party one of the backers gave after the opening of a Broadway play. Both of them had been asked for their ornamental qualities. Since the play had turned out to be a turkey, and the playwright was drunk in one room and the star in another, the party was a flop. Randolph's good manners and his naturally cheerful disposition made him a conspicuous exception to the ruling cynicism and gloom. Letia singled him out not knowing who he was but being bored with host and company. He had curly blond hair and a wide face. His broad shoulders seemed still broader under the discreet padding of his evening jacket. His eyes were big,

blue, innocent, and friendly. She asked him to come sit next to her.

To Randolph this was an exciting business. He had, of course, noticed Letia the minute she had come into the room. So had everyone else. She was something to notice even in a room full of people chosen for their looks. Her silver-blond hair clung to her soundly shaped head in a shingle bob and the effect was to make her finely cut features even more like the features of the most delicate sculpture. Her body was like a bud just turned flower—neither too slim nor too full. She wore it in a slip with only a short, almost girlish white taffeta evening dress over that. The taffeta dress had nothing chic about it, but the top was cut wide over her smooth young shoulders and the rest of it clung to her superb figure just enough to make the whole room conscious of it. Orlando Hicks had taught her to walk easily, upright, with her shoulders back where they belonged.

Being singled out by a pretty girl was nothing new to Randolph, but he had just enough wit to know that as a person Letia was out of his class. Her invitation, he perceived, did not mean that she was offering all or any part of herself in exchange for anything he could provide. He was pleased and grateful to her. He felt very much the way he had the afternoon his trainer walked him over to see Man o' War, just to show him what a real race horse looked like. And the same feeling of envy of the owner welled up in him, looking at Letia, that had mingled with his genuine awe of the beauty of the race horse.

For her part, Letia knew immediately that she had made a conquest. Randolph Phelps was much too innocent to conceal his admiration. Letia set about at once to find out what it was that was now added to her assets. Randolph broke every rule his mother had taught him; his instinct for self-preservation was numbed by his encounter with a young female who was lovelier than any horse he had ever known, even Man o' War. He told Letia about his owning Overhill Farms, about the two-year-olds he hoped would win for him this year. He skirted the subject of his mother in Westbury, who preferred furniture to horses, but horses to prospective daughters-in-law. In passing, he noted to himself that he was thinking of this beautiful thing next to him as a prospective daughter-in-law for his mother, and marveled at the casualness of his cour-

age. He told Letia about his house on Fifth Avenue and what a remarkably dull place it was. He gave her all his family's vital statistics except the exact sum the estate paid into his bank account for its executor to draw on to pay the bills. This information, however, he did not withhold. He simply did not know it himself.

Letia was fascinated.

In the Lindy's-Toni's speakeasy world to which Orlando had introduced her, Letia had grown used to men who insisted on explaining to her how rich they were and/or how they had made or acquired the money. She knew that men tell women these things partially to impress them and partially to impress themselves, but mostly because they have nothing else they know how to talk about or care about as much. Letia had grown used to this but was never as bored by such conversation as most women are, whether they are ladies or whores. She'd always liked to talk about money and how it was come by, and her interest was genuine even when she was impatient with the narrator's circumlocution or irritated by his vagueness. She had her own way of keeping him on the subject—which was by direct questions—and boastfulness never offended her. She was more inclined to approve of people who thought they were good and who told the world so.

For all these reasons she would have passed a pleasant evening listening to handsome Randy Phelps inventorying his assets even if they had been much more modest than they were. But she soon perceived that her newest acquisition was also far and away her richest. Phelps was the first really rich man she had ever known, and she wanted to feel—to touch, stroke, and examine—the stuff of which he was made.

Randolph Phelps thought that he had never met a woman who was more genuinely interested in him. This was not as naïve a reaction as it sounds. Randy Phelps could have been brighter but he had always been very rich, and he had the cunning of the very rich, who are hunted all their lives. He would have reacted instantly to the slightest insincerity in Letia. He might still have wanted her—even wanted her for his wife—but he would have known that at least a part of her interest was in what there was to get from him. He saw accurately that this was not so about Letia.

What Phelps would not have been bright enough to under-

stand, even if it had been explained to him, was that Letia was really no more interested in him, as a man and a human being, than the grabbiest chorus girl who had ever listened to his chatter patiently in the hope of reward. He was simply reassured by an instinct which told him that Letia wanted nothing of him. She didn't. But the intensity of her interest was in direct proportion to the substance of his wealth just the same.

Letia did not know why she wanted to know about rich people any more than she knew, really, why she was so anxious to be rich herself, why her bankbook gave her comfort. And when Randy Phelps took the plunge a few weeks after the evening they'd met and asked her for the first time to marry him, Letia turned him down without once giving serious consideration to the idea of annexing him for his money.

Money had almost a hypnotizing effect on Letia at this stage in her career. Her curiosity about people who had it was passionate. She thought constantly about getting more of it. But the idea of marrying it—of compromising one's freedom of action just to get one's hands on it—was beneath her. She had too much confidence in herself, for one thing. And too little meanness.

Randolph Phelps came into Letia's life not long after she got her first—and last—part in a Broadway production. He was not discouraged by being turned down. He even began to fall in love with Letia—beyond, over and above, and in addition to wanting still to marry her. He gave Letia a car—a dark green Packard roadster—and had the garage bill sent to him. He gave her ten thousand dollars' worth of jewelry for which he paid Fifth Avenue stores three times that much. He persuaded her to buy her clothes at Bergdorf Goodman's, and paid their bills, too. Letia's standard of living rose visibly.

Phelps did not accompany these gifts with further advances. He had held Letia's hand in his when he had proposed to her, sitting at a side table in Voisin's after an early dinner, but had never so much as patted her shoulder since. Letia accepted his bounty gracefully—her delight in presents was childlike—and it never occurred to her that any debt involved was not being continuously (and completely) discharged by her lunching or dining with Randolph two or three times a week. The

novelty of his conversation had long since worn off, and she considered the time she spent with him partially in the nature of a favor granted and partially as a chore which paid honestly for the things he gave her. She rarely wore the jewelry, anyway; she kept it in a safe-deposit box which she rented for the purpose.

And so Letia came into the second spring of her grown-up life in New York. After Dorothy Palmer left, she lived alone. Her flat was in the rear of the brownstone front, on the second floor. It consisted of a longish living room with a kitchenette behind folding doors at one end, and a tiny bedroom. The bedroom was barely big enough to hold a box spring and mattress, set on the floor for a bed, and a dressing table.

What furniture Letia had, she and Dorothy had picked up, the larger pieces at auctions. Letia's taste was sound enough, but she begrudged money spent on such nonessentials as curtains, lamps, and rugs. Bargain hunting, she was inclined to mix periods, and a modern overstuffed sofa with the lines of a set of children's blocks faced an elegant Louis XIV arm-chair, standing under mandarin red wall shelves stacked with some excellently designed Chinese porcelain. Few people, however, noticed the furnishings of a room Letia was in, and while she was concentrating on her first successes, Letia never did.

The trouble with Letia, that second spring in New York, was that for the first time she had no success to concentrate on achieving. She had her little part in the Broadway comedy, which ran on and on. She played a too-pretty rival whom the heroine promptly embarrassed and ran out of the script fifteen minutes, and a dozen sides, after she entered it midway in Act II. Other girls in Hicks' Academy had envied her getting the part, but Letia never thought much of it. Her time was filled with Orlando and Randy and their friends—and her mind and soul with impatience. For what? Letia had no idea. She only knew that something was damming up inside again. She was getting good and ready to bust. She had, however, no inkling that it was a man named Rogers who was about to do the busting.

Joe Rogers was a casual acquaintance of Orlando's. He was twenty-seven, tall, lean, stoop-shouldered already, handsome, sour. He was a junior editor on the only recently suc-

cessful *New Yorker* magazine. He made a hundred dollars a week, which was a big salary for *The New Yorker's* Harold Ross to pay then, and he lived in a one-room penthouse on 50th Street near Lexington Avenue. Like most of the young *New Yorker's* staff, he came from the West, had an iconoclastic attitude toward most of the deities then worshiped in the arts, and a passionate desire to create, or even to be part of creating, something better. The fact that neither he nor any of his associates had any idea what it was they sought to fashion left them without outlet for their passionate creativeness. They bought and printed what they disliked least, and could not bring themselves to put on paper more than a few paragraphs at a time of their own. About these they were as savagely critical as they were of the contributions they had to accept from others in order to have anything to print at all.

Joe's days were spent reading manuscripts, writing scathing notes about them, tinkering artists' captions, and being glowered at by Ross, of whom he was terrified. They began about ten and ended at six. Usually, immediately thereafter, he walked round the corner to a speakeasy known as The Bernaise which one entered through a stage-set restaurant empty of customers. Thence, one descended a narrow stairway into a bona fide kitchen beyond whose boiling cauldrons a door gave to a subterranean inner room. In this room, the food that was cooked in the kitchen was served with the liquor that was made every morning in an areaway behind a bolted steel door. Joe preferred The Bernaise to the already more fashionable Jack and Charlie's on 49th Street or the recently opened Stork Club on 58th, because The Bernaise was the only speakeasy in town which had overstuffed armchairs and even leather-covered sofas to sit in.

There were also apt to be more pretty girls to look at in The Bernaise, and now and then one would attract Joe enough for him to do something about it. The pretty girls in The Bernaise were not prostitutes, but they could usually be had for an evening for the promise of diversion. It was a place that girls from Wellesley and Smith knew about and came down to occasionally.

The Bernaise was not Orlando Hicks' place—he preferred the 52nd Street Toni's or the aspiring Sardi's, where there were more theatrical people. That is why it took such a long

time for Orlando and Letia to run into Joe, who was habitually holed up in his own corner settee at The Bernaise.

They met on Christmas Eve. Letia had spent the afternoon helping Orlando shop. Orlando was sentimental about Christmas. Letia was not. Neither was Joe. They had an immediate bond between them in this, like casual guests at a hunt breakfast who find they both dislike horses.

Letia soon found other things that interested her about Joe. In the world of young theater people in which she had spent the last year, grease paint is a sacred unguent. To Letia it had never been more than a messy inconvenience in a business for making a living. The truth was that the theater, with all its romanticizing of hardships, bored her. It bored Orlando too, but not all the time, or as much as it bored Letia. But it seemed to bore Joe Rogers even more, and Joe's pose was that he knew why, which was immediately impressive to Letia. The Theater, Joe said, was dull because it was phony.

The three points of view emerged as their proprietors sat on the divan in the cellar which was The Bernaise and drank grain alcohol which had been flavored to resemble whisky.

"You're the prettiest of Orlando's hicks I've met," said Joe affably. "The pun is not intended. It's inherent in Orlo's racket. Does he say you can act?"

Letia looked at Orlando and laughed. "He says so," said Letia, "but that's just because we're old friends. I'm a lousy actress. Are you a hick, too? Orlando says this place is a hick joint."

"Sure," said Joe, mildly irritated by the implication, "it's a hick joint. It's a classy hick joint, though. They use real hicks for bait. I'm a shill here. As soon as the place is full, I can scam."

They had two more rounds of alcohol disguised as whisky disguised as Old Fashioneds. Joe decided that this was a time to do something about it. He recognized, but also decided to ignore, his friend Orlando's proprietary rights. Orlando noted these decisions being made and was amused. He didn't think Joe would get very far. Besides, tonight he would catch the train home because it was Christmas Eve and his wife was sentimental about Christmas too. He gathered up his bundles and left, winking at Letia as he waved good-bye.

"She has to be at the theater by eight-fifteen," he said to Joe. "Take care of yourselves."

After Orlando had gone, Joe said, "He's a good guy."

"I know," said Letia. "Are you?"

"No," said Joe, "I'm a kind of a phony myself."

He tried to tell Letia why he thought so but seemed to find it difficult. Finally, looking her over somewhat insolently, he said, "You're some babe, babe."

"Why?" asked Letia, as if she really wanted to know.

Joe ignored the question.

"Are you Orlando's girl?" he asked her.

Letia shook her head. She looked straight into Joe's eyes, noted that they were large, dark, agate brown, and not arrogant but pleading. She also noted that while his eyes were alive and anxious, his body was still completely relaxed. He was leaning back, smoking a cigarette. He very definitely made her feel something. His being so relaxed, except in his eyes, excited her. Irrationally, she wanted to kiss him.

"Don't just sit there shaking your head," said Joe, quite sharply. "The next question is can you or can't you be made?"

"I don't think so," said Letia. Now she noted that Joe's arm was as sinewy and firm as Orlando's was fat and flabby. She also liked the loose tweed coat he was wearing; it was almost as rumpled as Orlando's clothes always were but somehow more attractively.

Letia knew nothing about Joe except that he was on *The New Yorker*, a weekly magazine which was a year old now and whose opinion had begun to be influential on Broadway. She had never read anything in *The New Yorker* except its review of the play she was in. She did not know whether Joe Rogers was rich or poor, effective or futile, kind or cruel, mean or generous. He was just a guy—but suddenly she was just a girl.

She shook her head again.

"That's not true," she said to Joe. "You can make me. I think you're swell."

They ordered another round in 'The Bernaise' but did not drink it. They just sat there grinning at each other. When the captain asked them to, they ordered dinner, but they did not eat it. Joe did not get Letia to the theater by eight-fifteen. He got her there just in time for her to get her costume and her make-up on. He waited for her in the alley until she came out again half an hour later. They walked hand in hand across the city to where Joe lived.

They did not look at all like an editor of *The New Yorker* and a smart young actress. They were moonstruck with each other. Joe thought that he was with the most beautiful woman he would ever know. He was right. He did not know how he had managed to talk to her at all. What he saw in her face was too wonderful to believe. What he saw was that, just like that, Letia was in love with him.

He said to himself, "I'm going to bitch it up. I would."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Sturges Trades God for The News*

WHILE LETIA HAD grown into a thing of beauty to behold before she was even out of her teens—and was falling in love for the first time—Sturges Strong was maturing into a stoop-shouldered youth, preoccupied with inanimate knowledge. In those days he was a dull fellow. But the twig was already being bent into the shape the mighty tree would take.

Sturges was neither a handsome nor a romantic figure, but at seventeen he was already a somewhat terrifying one. His professors at college were at first interested in him because he was an exceptionally attentive student. He was almost aggressive in his demands that his instructors tell him all they knew. In their classrooms, he had an irritating way of almost tearing the knowledge out of them.

But when his professors were inspired to ask him around for tea, they found him a boring companion. He was too literal, too unsubtle, too humorless. Moreover, he wanted to go right on learning from them after classes. He made them stop whatever they felt like doing—making tea or drinks or light conversation—and continue the lectures they were used to giving only in the classroom. When they tried to snub him for it, they soon found that Sturges had the hide of a young rhinoceros. Either he failed to understand their sarcasm or he ignored it. He would plow on through any interruption, intent on getting the answer to whatever it was he wanted to know—and he wanted to know everything.

This was disconcerting enough, but young Sturges had another intensely irritating habit, and that was to interrupt and give back to the professor his, Sturges', own précis of the professor's subject. This was never exactly the way the professor taught it. Sturges' version was always oversimplified, the qualifications were omitted, and the effect was somehow vaguely in bad taste. But Sturges' interpretations were always bold and sturdy and could not be dismissed, which made them even more enraging to the teachers challenged.

When he was not asked back a second time Sturges would

knock at faculty doors unasked, refusing to go away until his questions were taken seriously and he was given some kind of an answer. If, in the process, he failed to endear himself to his teachers, they had nevertheless to respect him for his persistence and to reward him with high marks.

With his classmates, however, nothing could have saved Sturges from becoming a total failure had he tried to intrude himself on them during his first year in New Haven. He had nothing to recommend him for their approval. Because he had not been to a fashionable boarding school, his clothes were wrong. He knew none of the contemporary slang in a world in which the right phrases were the passwords to acceptability. City-tutored in his teens, he played no sports.

All that would have been bad enough, but the list of his liabilities was only just begun. Up to the time that he arrived at Yale, Sturges had never had a drink, smoked a cigarette, or had a best girl. He had nothing whatever to talk about to fellow undergraduates. From his gruff father he had acquired none of the social graces. Moreover, the first contacts Sturges sought were with the religious societies at Yale, and the religious societies at Yale are chiefly patronized by the socially ostracized. To be too serious about religion in this religious New England institution was to be dismissed as a "Christer."

But despite these things, Sturges did eventually become a success at Yale—even a rather conspicuous one—and that success influenced his whole life. It is not often that the years spent in college really determine a man's career, but they did with Sturges Strong.

The world of Yale University is just big enough so that if a student really minds his own business he can put in his semesters totally unnoticed by his fellows, show up at his Fifth Reunion, and not be remembered by a single soul. There are lots of students who come very close to making just such a record. Usually they complete their social ostracism by making better-than-casual friends of half a dozen others of the friendless, which makes it easier for the "right" people to label and ignore them.

Ironically, Sturges' eventual success at Yale was based on the fact that he spent his first year in New Haven so thoroughly preoccupied with the acquisition of knowledge that even the other misfits ignored him.

The result of this was that Sturges came back as a sopho-

more with no strikes on him. He was also, because of the seriousness with which he had taken his pursuit of knowledge, far and away the best-informed man in his class—which also played a part. He had, in fact, very nearly completed the four-year course in one.

However much he had annoyed them, Sturges had given the faculty no choice but to force his education by recommending books and authorities that he would not normally have studied until he was almost ready to graduate. The result of this, in turn, was that in his sophomore year Sturges led all his classes almost effortlessly. He thus attained eminence as a scholar in his sophomore year without acquiring the taint of being a greasy grind. Moreover, in the meantime, by the simple process of replenishment of wardrobe in local shops, Sturges had finally blossomed out in the costume of the day, which was a single-breasted, four-button, herringbone suit, and so could be readily distinguished by the socially correct from the queers, the unwashed, and the townies.

All of these circumstances combined to make it possible for Sturges to aspire to undergraduate acceptability for the first time. The effort that was still required came from within himself.

Sturges' literal mind had now, for practical purposes, exhausted the formal educational possibilities of Yale, so he turned it to other aspects of undergraduate life. Having no talent for pleasure or sport, he made a characteristically intelligent decision to make a specialty of the business end of undergraduate publications. Considering these publications, he passed up the humorous *Record* and the literary *Lit* and came to rest on *The Yale Daily News* which, like Sturges, took itself very seriously.

Sturges' long hours of reading in the quiet of his freshman study now paid off again. While other serious-minded sophomore competitors for positions on *The Yale Daily News* had to spend at least a few hours a week with their books, Sturges could coast on what he had learned the year before. He concentrated on soliciting advertising from local merchants and threw himself into the sport with the same single-minded zest with which he had pursued academic knowledge when he first arrived in New Haven. Sturges could spend all his time heeling *The News* and still not only stay in college but stay at the head of his classes to boot.

By the time Sturges had so far outdistanced the competition that it was inevitable that he would be business manager, his associates were, at last, very much aware of him. They were not unfavorably impressed either, for the business Sturges brought in made *The Yale Daily News* considerably richer, and the undergraduate proprietors of the "oldest college daily" take the profits at the end of the year for their personal endowment. Sturges was seen to be a useful fellow to have around. He came to be known, half in affection and half in disparagement, as the Virgin Sturgeon, and he acquired a very large circle of acquaintances. The acquaintance who became his friend was the fellow competitor who would be made editor when Sturges was finally made business manager. His name was Allen Bishop.

Allen Bishop had had the right social preparations for Yale. He had spent four years at Hotchkiss School where, in those days, the whole emphasis was on conformity. Hotchkiss was the happy, if unlikely, choice of Allen's parents. It was the unlikely choice because they were theater people; it was the happy choice because Allen was such an aggressively unorthodox boy himself that the snobbery at Hotchkiss did him no harm and the friends he made there lasted him all his life. Allen's father had been a vaudeville actor and, in the Twenties, was the manager of a chain of moving picture houses in New England. He had decided to send Allen to Hotchkiss because he and Allen's mother had spent their honeymoon in the little Connecticut town where Hotchkiss is located. It took a lot of doing to get Allen in a school which aspired to be known as snobbish, but actors know, and are often liked by, all kinds of people. Bishop, Sr., had friends amongst Hotchkiss' small alumni and they did the trick. They never regretted it.

Young Allen Bishop was a great success.

Allen was a warm and generous boy. He was good-looking without being pretty. He had good manners and an easy wit. Like most children of theatrical people he was mature beyond his years. He never had any problem making friends for he wanted nothing of anyone but the chance to be amusing or useful to them. Moreover, he was extremely bright and had a talent for putting words together, whether on paper or in speech.

When he got to Yale, Allen Bishop was the only boy in the class who stood higher than Sturges. He was brighter and

he was also a lot more fun. He soon became one of the naturally accepted leaders of his class.

Allen had never even said "Hi!" to Sturges in his freshman year, but they got to know each other when they were both working to get on *The News*. Allen liked the serious-minded Sturgeon immediately and differed from the professors in being wholly undisturbed by Strong's boring, insistent questions. Sturges liked Allen because he was always so patient answering these questions, and Sturges sensed that he could talk to Allen without losing caste about even such a delicate matter as his chance of getting in a good fraternity. To the college, Sturges soon came to be regarded as Allen Bishop's protégé, and Bishop's endorsement played an important part in Strong's being accepted by his important classmates as their social equal.

When Sturges returned to New Haven to begin his junior year, Allen Bishop was his best friend. You could at the time have seen them almost any evening at Mory's, surrounded by an admiring court. They were Big Men at Yale now. It would be Allen whom most of the group had gathered to be near; it would be Sturges who would be lecturing them—on any subject from Chaucerian English to the finer points of defensive tackle play. Allen's contribution would be to turn too literal a comment from Sturges into a joke, or to make some wry good-humored comment of his own. They seemed a marvelous combination then—Sturges, the personality that was already massive and driving; Allen, the perfect foil, with all the warmth and lightness of touch that Sturges lacked. It should have surprised no one that out of the combination of these two should rise one of the twentieth century's most important publishing houses.

Only a few years before, Time, Inc., had begun in a not dissimilar combination, when Henry Luce and Briton Hadden had been undergraduates. Their success in establishing their own magazine in the early Twenties made each subsequent generation of undergraduate journalists at Yale aspire to imitate them. And nowhere else than at Yale were the prospects as good, for individual enterprise was in the Yale tradition in the Twenties. Not only had Yale given the world Luce and Hadden but also such entrepreneurs as Juan Trippe, who was to make his own Pan American Airways into the greatest airline in the world, and William Benton and Chester Bowles,

who were each to graduate into national politics from the advertising agency they had made so fabulously successful only a few years after their graduation. The culture in which all these enterprises grew was the tradition of the Yale graduate listening with sympathy to the ambitions of successive generations in New Haven. Yale is even closer to Wall Street than its fellows in the Ivy League, despite Porcelian and the House of Morgan, and in the Twenties, at least, Yale undergraduates could think in terms of the connections and the capital that could turn their dreams into reality.

The success of the Bentons and the Luces was in the very atmosphere of New Haven when Sturges and Allen were there. It was not there in the tangible form of any one graduate's offer to help them if they had an idea worth backing. But it was there in the sense that the most active-minded of each year's undergraduates could see no reason to resign themselves to any limitations. The example of Trippe alone would have reminded them that the world was made to be conquered by a Yale man.

So even before the final shape of their idea came to them, Sturges' and Allen's attitude toward life was full of confidence, and it would never have occurred to either of them that they sounded a little ridiculous talking so importantly of themselves at their age.

The undergraduate gatherings that Allen and Sturges sponsored, first at Mory's and later in the room that they shared in their senior year at Yale, had from the very beginning the crude shape that was to provide the form for *Facts*, *The Knowing Weekly*. They were extracurricular lectures in pungent vernacular on topics of the day, with the subject matter oversimplified for popular consumption. And as these forums continued, they began to have as much effect on the lecturers as on those who were lectured. Sturges was the first to be touched. Having audiences to lecture to became so important to him that his proposition to Allen that they room together during their last year at Yale was cast in those terms.

"People like to come and see you, Al," was the way Sturges put it. "And I like to be around when they get here. We should stay together. It stimulates me." Then he added shyly, "Do I shoot off my mouth too much?"

Allen laughed. "Glad to have you," he said easily. "The lads like to hear what we tell 'em. They repeat what they

hear around our place. Besides, I get a kick out of it too. We're getting to be a very influential pair. I don't know if I'd ever have the energy to hand it out the way you do, Sturgeon, but I like kicking it around too."

Sturges knew he liked their growing importance in the undergraduate world, but he had yet to realize just how much it had come to mean to him. He had hardly been a personality at all during his first two years in New Haven—he had been a mechanical man. It was as if he had put aside the business of growing emotionally for the mechanical accumulation of facts. In the beginning, even his new friendship with Allen did not bring him out of his preoccupation with acquiring facts. It had been Allen who had adopted him, almost patronizingly, not vice versa. But after the audiences which Allen attracted had thawed him out, Sturges began to grow again. Immediately, the growing began to hurt.

Perhaps it was the security of the position he had now acquired, perhaps it was the stimulation of being for the first time since he was very small with boys of his own age—really mingling with them after classes, exchanging ideas, feeling them around him—whatever it was, Sturges began again to feel sensations of guilt which he could not explain. He began to worry about God again. He began to be moody and to go for long walks out Whitney Avenue by himself. The coming of spring, when other boys were burning off the rising sap on baseball fields or at Savin Rock, only made things worse for Sturges. His only extracurricular activity was holding forth—an occupation which now began to bore even him. Finally, a month or so before the end of his junior year, it got so bad that he confided in Allen Bishop.

Sturges had never confided in anyone before. He took Allen to dinner at a restaurant in a hotel down near the railway station called The Garde. The more usual use to which Yale students put The Garde in those days was as a place to meet girls with whom it was not discreet to be seen. Here, of all places, Sturges had actually gone to the trouble of hiring a private dining room. After an extremely indifferent dinner, he insisted on the table's being cleared and Allen's lighting a cigar before he began to talk about what was on his mind.

Allen Bishop was first astonished, then fascinated, and finally, after three hours of it, exhausted.

He was astonished because the least he had expected was

to hear that Sturges had acquired a girl, and the real subject came as an anti-climax so unexpected that it was astonishing.

He was fascinated because all this elaborate preparation had been made for a confession of adolescent guilt, of spiritual inadequacy, of unworthiness before the Lord.

He was exhausted because it was so difficult to discover from the torrent of words that Sturges loosed what in hell it was all about.

Finally, by patient questioning, he put together a narrative that at least made some sense to him. Sturges had come to Yale to find God and had become the business manager of *The Yale Daily News* instead.

Allen thought he was nuts.

But Sturges' sincerity was so passionate, he seemed so genuinely troubled in his soul, that, instead of saying what he thought, Allen called on all his somewhat limited philosophical resources and tried to be of assistance.

"Look here, Sturgeon old boy," he said, "God knows I'm no authority but I think most people go through what's happening to you some time or another. My parents weren't very religious so it never exactly happened to me—but I see how it *could* happen. The Church means a lot to lots of people. Some time or other you've got to adjust yourself to what it means to you. Maybe that adjustment is always painful."

"You don't understand," said Sturges. "It was the only important thing in my life only a few years ago—my Faith. What have I done to it, Al?"

"I think it's probably still there, old boy," said Allen soothingly. "You'll find it again. It's perfectly normal to take a little time off from religion—I should think—especially at our age."

"No, I won't," said Sturges bitterly. "I'm getting it clear now, talking to you. I know now, Al."

"What do you know?" asked Allen curiously.

"I know I've lost a faith which I'll never get back again," said Sturges sententiously. "I've liked this last year at Yale too much. I've liked you and the fellows and *The News* and—well, just being around. I used to think I could be a good Christian and that it would be enough in my life, but it turns out it isn't enough—for me."

Before dinner, Sturges had bought two cigars. He had given Allen his. Now he took the remaining one out of his pocket

and lit it. He held it in front of him and looked at it with judicious contemplation.

"Well, Allen," he said, "this is a historic night for me. I've faced the fact that I've lost my faith in God."

He hesitated and frowned. "Well no, I haven't really lost my faith in God. God is there all right and I'll still go to church. But I know I'm a back-row Christian now—just a fellow who sits in the rear pew and puts his money in the plate. I used to feel . . . yes . . . it was right the way I put it the first time. I've lost my faith, Allen."

Allen had nothing to contribute to this conclusion which seemed to Sturges to be very final.

"But this isn't a bad life I've got in trade, is it now?" asked Sturges, taking a deep and appreciative drag on his cigar.

"I think maybe—in time—you can find better restaurants than this in which to suffer it," said Allen. "Let's go down to The Rock. It's a nice night."

"Now I've had the guts to face it," said his friend, "and know just where I stand . . . well . . . the answer is, yes. Do you think you can find me a babe, Al?"

Allen got up and recovered a battered felt hat from a rack in the corner.

"You're going to shoot the works, eh, pal?" he said, and put his arm about the Sturgeon's shoulders, which by now had quite noticeably lost their sag.

"I am," said the Virgin Sturgeon, and out they went.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Letia Thinks Like a General*

THE WILDEST THOUGHTS filled Letia the first morning she awoke by Joe Roger's side. Sleepily she pushed at the bedclothes until she was sitting up.

The sun was up over the East River and came in through the early morning haze and the dull vibration of the elevated trains on Third Avenue. It lit the disorder of Joe's room, making everything glow with warmth—the untidy New England pine desk, its cubbyholes stuffed with papers that might have been letters or bills or advertisements, the typewriter on its metal stand on wheels, the big overstuffed armchair in the bright chintz slipcover with the ugly reading lamp craning over its shoulder, the crammed bookcases with most of the books on their shelves still in shiny paper jackets and more books piled on top of them and new growths of books sprouting in a dozen tiny heaps on the near-by floor. There were curtains in a green print, half covering the two windows which faced east and south, giving onto narrow terraces. Beyond, the water towers of neighboring apartment houses could be seen and the heavy, high-reaching walled side of the Shelton Hotel a block away. In the early morning sunlight everything seemed exciting, rich, and full of promise.

The wildest of Letia's thoughts was that she was home again, back after a long journey and a life amid foreign things. Not literally, to the home she grew up in in Morristown, though she remembered that her father—her real father—had had a room like this, full of books and shiny papers and crinkly things. Not literally home to Morristown but *home*, to where she belonged and could be happy again amid familiar things, and secure. Her father had had a room like this, but not like this. Not as full of living or as wholly masculine. But there was the same smell of pipes and tobacco.

In every pore of her body Letia was happy. She had never once been wholly happy before and the strange exhilarating feeling brought tears to her eyes.

She was excited all over again by the very fact of Joe's

existence—Joe, of whom she knew not a single important fact except that when he touched her she could die of the intensity of her feeling. He lay now close beside her, on his face, his face turned away from her, his arms tangled over his tousled head. He came up to her in waves of being which made her limp. She moved very cautiously in the bed so as not to disturb his sleep.

She had no feelings of regret or confusion. Everything in life was good and so well understood it did not need to be explained.

She turned and felt for the floor with her feet and rose and stood upright and stretched in the sun. Her face was so lovely no painter could have painted it.

The whole creative strength of her seemed at once grown and freed. There was nothing that she could not create, for in her body she could begin a race of finer, stronger men, of lovelier, more useful women. She was wholly adequate. She was all love.

She sat naked in his chair and waited without impatience for the man who had awakened her himself to awake. She thought, now calmly, of what he might be like, not knowing what that might be, but knowing that he was wonderful—really knowing, in love, that he was wonderful and that whatever was not wonderful about him was not really him, any more than the dull person that she had been only yesterday was herself.

When half an hour passed and he had not wakened, she could stand being even the width of a room apart from him no longer. She felt suddenly as weak without him as she had felt strong and sufficient in the thought of his existence. She came back into his bed where she could feel the warmth of his body again and stroke his face with the tips of her fingers. It did not make her feel strong again. She felt weaker than ever, knowing now that her adequacy was so wholly dependent on this strange male thing. Before he woke she even cried a little, feeling helpless, like a little girl again.

They had breakfast in the corner room in the Plaza Hotel, at a big table by a window. Neither of them could eat, any more than they'd been able to eat together a few hours after they'd met. They had slept very little but they were not tired at all. The least little thing about each other enchanted them both. They hardly spoke, but people all the way across the

big room were conscious of them and felt good for being in the same place with them.

Joe did not even call *The New Yorker* office although he should have because he was supposed to work that Christmas Day, editing some manuscripts that were late getting to press. They went back to his miniature penthouse and took the two straight-backed chairs he owned out onto the terrace and sat in the sun, talking. It was one of those wonderful, almost hot, sunny days that so often break New York's early winter.

Her first hurt came when Joe began speaking of his work and the bitterness of his frustration welled up in him and twisted his thin features. He really hated where he worked. She slipped from her chair and knelt beside him, looking up into his face and holding his body in her arms. She could not bear his suffering so.

"You will write wonderful things," she said. "That is nothing, that place. I think they must all hate themselves—and they've made you hate you and that's a sin because you're wonderful."

"I'm not wonderful, baby," he said. "I'm just another guy who doesn't know the score."

"You *are* the score, darling," she said. "Don't you know that? You're a terrific man. You must never play by other people's rules. You're the one who makes the rules."

"I know how lousy I am," said Joe. "That's the only thing that's good about me, sweetheart. You wouldn't know how lousy I am because you're not a writer—thank God!"

"Don't *say* that." Letia's eyes were wide in horror. "Don't ever say that again. It's not true. You're a wonderful writer. You make love like a wonderful writer."

She drew his face down to hers and kissed it. But some giant of pain had carried Joe away from her, back into himself.

"You're being banal," he said harshly. "You don't know anything about writing. You're just a hell of a pretty dope."

Letia was on her feet, furious with rage.

"Joe! Stop it! I won't let you talk like that about yourself. What do you know about how good you are? How *can* you believe those silly idiots with their silly magazine?"

But Joe was beyond recall. Now Letia's very savageness reinforced every suspicion of his own inadequateness. He had begun speaking to her of what was important to him, feeling as superior in love as Letia herself had felt. He had

begun objectively, inventorying his limitations simply because they were limitations no more. He could never again be hurt by Ross's sarcastic comment on the fuzziness of a sentence he wrote. He would never again feel things he could not express. But even as he was speaking, the hurtful remembrances came back to him and he forgot Letia and where he was for a moment. Then all the pent-up anguish at the inadequacy he had felt since he was a boy broke out of him.

If Letia could only have listened just a little longer it might have all come out of him like poisonous pus from a lanced sore and he would have felt well again. But she tried to stop the flow too soon. Damming it again with all the violence of her nature, driven by every instinct to preserve intact what she herself was dependent on, she checked nature's own way of curing; and Joe was lost.

In the agony of his frustration, the natural authority in Letia's voice, her towering above him as he sat slouched against the parapet of the terrace, her lips compressing in anguish—all these things made him feel more like a helpless little boy than ever, full of things he could not put in words, full of love he dared not feel, miserable beyond bearing. He fought back to save himself. He fought Letia whom he loved. He had to kill Letia, whom he loved.

"You overdo it, darling," he said. "You're a ham. Oh, my God!—I should find myself mixed up with a ham. For God's sake, shut up!"

Letia did not answer him but simply stood there looking down. The hate in him came up at her, enveloped her.

Presently she began to sob and to shake her head as if to deny what she was feeling. No thoughts came to her and she did not know that her knees gave way and that she crumpled, there on the terrace, falling half against the man's knees. She was quite unconscious.

On the tilted straight-back chair above her, Joe Rogers, the writer who made his living as an editor, began also to cry. He cried as if his heart was breaking, which it was. He could not stop crying even when he got up and stood facing the brick wall by the window and beat against it with his fists. He cried and cried and said over and over again, "You bastard . . . you damn bastard."

Finally he felt better and he knelt down by Letia. Her face was very white and her lips the color of light coral

where they showed from under the hard red of her lipstick. She was breathing quietly, regularly. Her eyes were closed. She was sleeping. She had run away from life into sleeping. "I'll get us out of it, darling," Joe said to her. "It was just one of those things. I'm all right now. I love you very, very much."

Letia did not hear these things then, but after she awakened he said them over to her a great many times.

Letia was sure he was right. It all seemed like something that hadn't happened. But it had happened and, having happened once, it had to happen again and again, just like that, with appropriate variations, only in diminishing intensity as they got used to it.

Letia stayed wholly in love with Joe for a little over twelve hours. She stayed partially in love for much longer. This was because she did not give up easily and would not resign herself to the fact that they would never again regain the wholeness of that first evening. Up until the very end she would have married Joe. He never asked her because he was never sure enough of his own feelings. As long as she had any feeling for him, as long as it came back to her in happy moments, Letia would not believe she could not master the situation, dominate it by sheer force of personality—and this despite the fact that everyone she knew tried to dissuade her.

Orlando, of course, was furious. Partially his pride was hurt. Partially he disapproved of Joe, whose weaknesses he had known for years. Sometimes the crowd at Lindy's was indignant at some crack that Joe had written in *The New Yorker*. Orlando would dismiss the complaint with, "Aw, the guy was born to bitch. Skip it." But mostly Orlando was offended by what falling in love had done to Letia. He could not put his finger on it, but she was no longer a general. Generals didn't sit alone all afternoon at a corner table in The Bernaise waiting for privates in somebody else's army to get off duty. It didn't, he felt, become Letia. Neither did the new softness in her. She was often almost gentle, submissive. Orlando had a hard time persuading her not to walk out on her part in the show because she thought Joe might need her some evening when she was in the theater.

Most emphatically Orlando Hicks disapproved of his pro-

tégée's present treatment of Randolph Phelps. He barely persuaded her not to write Phelps out of her life entirely; he could not keep her from telling Randy all about Joe and once even asking Phelps why he did not start a magazine of his own and make Joe the editor. Orlando was amazed that this new state of affairs seemed to make so little difference in Randy's attitude. He knew all about the bills that Phelps was paying and how little return he had ever got for them.

When Orlando finally got it through his head that Randy was going to stick it out—he knew Phelps only as a speak-easy acquaintance and through Letia—his hope for Letia's salvation revived. He began a cautious campaign of talking to Letia about Randy which eventually put the idea of doing what she did in Letia's head.

"It's all right *now*," he said to Letia one afternoon, sprawled on the modern sofa in her apartment. "Sure, I know you've got Joe now. But what gets me, baby, is why you never married that guy Phelps *before* Joe came along."

Letia was at the dressing table in her bedroom, around the corner of the open door from Orlando. She had gone to the bank that morning and had taken out the things that Phelps had given her and she was holding up two sets of earrings to see which she thought the more becoming, the big single pearls or the clusters of little diamonds. She had no feeling at all about wearing them to make herself more attractive to Joe. They belonged to her.

"Now what a thing to say," her voice came through the doorway to Orlando. "I was waiting, darling. I always knew it could be like this, Orlo."

"Like hell you did," said Orlando sourly. "Neither did I. I never thought you'd make a monkey of yourself for a comma catcher."

"Now that's enough of that," said Letia, appearing in the doorway. "D'you like these, Orlo?" She tossed her shingled head and made the little diamonds sparkle.

"I don't, really," she went on gaily. "Randy has no taste. Somebody at Cartier's picked these out for him. Wait till you see the ones that Joe gets me."

"From which Five and Ten?" asked Orlando, stretching. "Look, I still don't get it. It's an academic question with me. About *now*, I understand. But why didn't you marry

Randolph when you weren't in love with anybody else?"

"You're serious?" asked Letia, proceeding across the room to the kitchenette part of it. She always made Orlando a drink and left it with him when she went to meet Joe.

"Sure, I'm serious," said Orlando. "I worry about things I don't understand."

"Well," said Letia, now wrestling with an ice tray, "I don't think I ever thought much about it, really. I like Randy but I think if I had married him he would have shipped me down to Westbury in a box car, with three grooms to look after me and the very best imported hay to eat. I don't think I would do well in anybody's stable, Orlo. Girls are just things that Randy likes to go out in the paddock and pat. He likes girls pretty, like horses—and I'm prettier than either his horses or the other girls he knows.

"I *am* prettier, aren't I, Orlando?" She turned clear around in front of him.

"You've got Randy wrong," said Orlando. "He's got respect for you."

"Uh, huh," said Letia. "And that's just what I don't want to marry anybody for, Orlo. If I had married Randy, Orlo, it would have been just to get rich quick. That wouldn't have been nice, would it?"

"The hell it wouldn't," said Orlando. "But you've got the whole deal wrong, kid. Being Mrs. Randolph Phelps isn't being cooped up in a box stall. It isn't marrying for money either. It's a full-time executive position in which you put out plenty for value received. I used to run up against a lot of those dames when I was a reporter. They don't give nothing in bed—at home. But they earn their keep just the same. Running fifty-seven servants and shipping 'em four times a year, all up and down the Atlantic Coast—and back to New York to get the kids in school in October. And running charity bazaars and horse shows and things like that. It's *worth* a lot of dough, a job like that."

"And where do those kids come from, if they don't give in bed at home?" said Letia, putting a cocktail in Orlando's paw and patting him affectionately on the cheek.

"Aw, lots of 'em haven't got kids," said Orlando. "It isn't the fashion any more. That was prewar stuff." Then, sitting up and drinking, "That's what I never got about the whole deal. You could have written the script any way you liked and

it was a big part. It would have paid plenty—and Randy would have gotten two bucks' worth for every dollar he put up for the show. Jesus, kid, he would knock 'em dead just having you up at the other end of the table. Ah well, one of these days some society dame will come along who will snap it up and you can follow her career in the rotogravures."

"Do you think I'll get asked to the wedding?" asked Letia. "There are two more in here," putting the shaker on a little table by the sofa. "Don't fall asleep after I've gone. You're supposed to be having dinner with Howard Dietz."

As Letia went out, she called back gaily from the hallway, "Darling, I left some things on my dressing table. Will you put them in my drawer and snap the lock, please? I ought to take them back to the bank but it's closed by now."

Orlando had no idea whether he had made any impression on her, but he found ways to renew the attack from time to time.

Toward the end of the summer, Harold Ross fired the fourth managing editor he had had on *The New Yorker* and called Rogers into his office.

"I'll be damned if I know why I do these things," he said to Rogers, "but you might as well be managing editor as anyone else. At least I know all the things that are the matter with you."

One of the less conspicuous of Harold Ross's eccentricities was to pin up evidence of blunders by his staff on the wall over his desk. Each of these he kept there for some weeks to remind him of the frailties of his associates. There were two of Rogers' boners on the wall that day. One was a slip initialed "J.R.," instructing a secretary to send back the manuscript of a short casual which had later appeared in Franklin P. Adams' column. From Adams' column, Ross himself had clipped the piece and made it the subject of a lecture to his editors on what kind of stuff he wanted in the magazine. Red-faced, Rogers had confessed that the piece had already been in *The New Yorker's* office once, and that he himself had rejected it. Ross had hunted up the evidence and struck it there to keep himself angry about the incident.

Rogers said, "Okay. How long do you think I'll last?"

"Long enough to make a God-damned nuisance of yourself," said Ross. "Have you learned *anything* around here?" glowering, not at Rogers but at the chamber of literary horrors on the wall.

"Why did you fire Hart?" Rogers asked.

"I fired Hart because he wasn't a genius," said the editor-in-chief. "You aren't either. But maybe I can beat some sense into you."

There was a silence.

"And another thing," Ross continued, "what the hell's all this I hear about your being in love? Is that what makes you do things like that?"—pointing to the wall.

Another silence.

"Well I don't give a damn, but for God's sake, don't marry her. You could be a good writer, Rogers. You won't be anything if you get married now. You don't know anything yet—and nobody else around here does either. If you can't make things work around here, I'm through. I mean that, Rogers. Fleishmann can take this whole God-damned magazine and put it any place he pleases. You are the last hope I've got of anybody making sense around here. Now get out of here and get to work."

Rogers' promotion came on a Monday after it had happened again with him and Letia over the week end. It happened because Letia became angry when Joe told her, as a bitter joke on himself, about his rejecting the piece that Adams later printed, and explained the mental torture which Ross devised for such cases.

This time Letia's attack on the standards that Joe accepted was intelligent, articulate, and persistent. That only made things worse. Rogers understood with his mind that she was trying to help him, that she was defending him against some resignation to defeat within himself. As always, it made him furious. The very position from which she attacked was unfair. What did she know about anything? She was even a bad actress.

Rogers told Letia she was a bad actress, painstakingly and in detail. He got up and mimicked her reading of her lines, which he knew by heart. He had done it several times before and Letia had always been astonished as well as hurt because it was important to her only that she read her silly lines well enough to get paid for it. But this time, Letia suddenly found she was neither hurt nor astonished. She was just tired of it. She said something that would have been impossible for her to have even thought of as recently as a month earlier. She

said, "Oh, please stop it, Joe. You're boring the hell out of me."

The next day, the day that Ross made Joe managing editor, Letia did the first objective thinking she had done in five months. She walked alone under the rumble of the Sixth Avenue El and thought. She thought the same quality of thoughts that she used to think when she was a young girl before she came to New York. She thought clearly, like a general again, and came rapidly to a decision.

But after it was all over, and she had made her decision, Letia retained the knowledge she had acquired of why she was in this world. She knew what being in love could make of her. She knew her own capacity for loving, and she came slowly to the conclusion that only someone as vital as she herself was could fulfill it. She did not despise Joe. She was sorrier for him than for herself. She knew that in many ways—in his sensitivity to truth, in his appreciation of honesty, and in the true creativeness which he could not master in himself—she knew that in these things he was a finer person than she. She also knew that as a human being she was the stronger, the one generally abler to cope with hostile environment. She had more vitality than he, more capacity for living and feeling. She fooled herself less.

She did not know what had happened to her love for Joe. Nothing that he had done explained to her why it was gone. She was scornful of the idea that it could have been killed by the pain he inflicted—he was as often generous and thoughtful as cruel. She was certain that what she had felt for him could never have been destroyed by unkindness. It should have been an honor to have suffered his unkindness. She was confident of the strength and durability of the emotion she was capable of. If this had really been right for her, she told herself, nothing Joe could have done would have mattered.

She went all over it in her mind, once more, from beginning to end. She had known Joe now for five months. This time she had no doubts at all. Her walk under the El was ended.

She was having lunch with Randy Phelps at Voisin's that day, and when she got there she came right to the point. She said, "I'm not in love any more, Randy. I'd like to marry you now."

*Sturges Keeps a Secret*

BOTH STURGES AND Letia were 'precocious in the sense that they were hardly grown before they plunged themselves into adult activities. There was no hesitation about either of them. Both of them were also unusual in that they reached positions of prominence in their very early twenties.

Sturges was still a junior when he began to lay the foundation on which he built the edifice of his commercial success. In the next few years as many things happened to him as happen to most men, even exceptionally active ones, in a lifetime.

The idea of actually starting a weekly magazine called *Facts* had been Allen Bishop's. It had come to him toward the end of their junior year when the approach of commencement reminded most third-year students that next time June rolled round it would be their turn. As the only son of a family on the edge of show business, it had been natural for Allen to think in terms of audiences. The audiences most visibly at hand were the groups of other students who gathered spontaneously in his room several times a week now, to be amused by him and informed by his booming friend, Sturges. When one evening Sturges spoke of not being on hand that night "to talk to the fellows," the thought tickled Allen. He said, "Why don't we mimeograph tonight's lecture, Sturg?" Then he thought about it seriously and the idea of a magazine of their own, of his and Sturges', came to him.

Both boys had been working together for the undergraduate daily for two years now. So Allen proposed starting a magazine together when they graduated. Sturges' eyes widened, his jaw dropped in astonishment at the enormous rightness of the notion. He roared:

"You've got it, Al; you've got it"—and from that moment he knew what he was in this world to accomplish.

"What'll we print in it, Sturgeon?" Allen asked him.

"Facts. Nothing but facts. No crap. What makes the world tick."

"Facts. That's a good word. Better than *Time*," said Allen, speculatively. "That's what we'll call it."

"Facts for Sale," Sturges danced up and down in his new excitement. "That's our business. The libraries are full of them, all free. So are the papers. Our raw material won't cost us a thing."

"We'll get the money the way Hadden and Luce got it. We'll pass the hat. There's plenty of jack right here in the Class of '29."

"I'll get Luce and Hadden's figures. Father knows Bill Griffin. He's a director. He put up some of the first dough."

Although it had been Sturges' booming recitations that had inspired Allen with the idea of publishing a magazine in the first place, it was simply assumed between the boys that Allen would be the editor of it. Their original relationship of editor and business manager of the undergraduate daily was simply to carry over into the commercial venture.

By the time they came back to New Haven to begin their senior year, Allen Bishop and Sturges Strong were half way to first base. Sturges had actually maneuvered himself into a job on a lumbering project in Georgia in which William V. Griffin, original *Time* investor, was interested. From two conversations with Griffin, Sturges had squeezed all the facts he felt *Facts* needed about how to set itself up in the publishing business.

As for Allen, he had talked it over with his father who'd said, "The show's what brings in the money, son. It sounds like a good idea, but don't worry about anything except how good your show is." So Allen had amused himself at the family's place on the shore by putting together little pieces of facts, rewriting paragraphs from the encyclopedia, trying to make the mangled news stories in the Boston papers make sense. He became obsessed with the problem of how to make the facts in news readable, how to make facts "a good show." He had talent and he enjoyed himself.

Unlike Sturges, who was habitually driven by aggressions he did not understand and seemed rarely to enjoy anything, Allen almost always had a good time.

When the two boys came together in the fall, Allen had the makings of a magazine in an old briefcase of his father's; Sturges had long sheets of yellow paper with figures on them which showed how much it ought to cost for rent and print-

ing and paper and salaries and telephones—and how much they'd make at what circulations.

Long, lean old Professor Lyman nodded gravely when Sturges first explained the new magazine to him while they were walking away from a classroom.

"You and Bishop will do well with it, Strong," he said. "There is nothing the American people like more than a fact, any fact. Americans are always more interested in facts than in their significance. They think facts are indisputable. 'A fact is a fact' we say; 'facts first, opinions afterwards.'"

"That's a slogan for us, sir," said Sturges excitedly. "'Facts First!' That's okay, sir."

"What about Harry Luce's *Time*?" asked the professor. "You'll be treading on *his* heels, Strong."

"Luce's sheet is too flip," said Sturges with finality. "It only appeals to people who aren't sound. The way it's done, I mean."

"Of course," he added reflectively, "we owe a lot to Luce and Hadden. We've decided not to worry about people thinking we're an imitation. We're going to organize our facts the way they did. But *Time's* old hat already, sir. And it hasn't got the proper respect for literary values—or for what other people have accomplished."

"I'm afraid that, too, is an American failing," said Professor Lyman, smiling down at Sturges. "But it's a strength, too. You'll do well. Only some day, Strong, try to manage a few days off and see what you can make of these facts you're so fond of. What do they add up to? We're getting very rich, here in this country. What are we going to do with all our money and power after we've got it? What is the historic role of American civilization? We've played no part in world affairs so far, you know—and we're nearly full grown, Strong. The World War didn't count—for us—we simply helped pull someone else's chestnuts out of the fire."

"Too highbrow, sir," said Sturges with conviction, "questions like that. For now, I mean. For a big circulation."

"I know, Strong," Professor Lyman had concluded, "and I think you may be quite right. But I expect that before you're done you'll have no choice about it. You'll have to come to some conclusions. Nature won't let you stay children forever."

In more practical matters, Sturges and Allen did not pro-

pose to remain children one minute longer than they could help. As soon as they had reunited with their respective plans, Allen and Sturges set about to raise the money to finance them. For a while it looked as if that, too, would be no trouble at all.

It was the winter of 1928-29. Everyone was rich, speculation-minded. When he saw that the boys were taking it seriously, Allen's father made several trips over from Boston to advise them. He had the lawyer for the chain of theaters he managed draw up a fifty-fifty partnership between them, and in the spring of 1929 he sent them together to Wood, Wickersham, Root, Sullivan and Taft in New York to have *Facts, The Knowing Weekly*, incorporated. The name of the corporation would be simply Facts, Incorporated. A Wood, Wickersham junior partner by the name of James Aloysius Falkenstall did the work for them and was fascinated by finding himself so close to the actual act of creation of a new literary enterprise.

It was Allen who approached such parents of classmates as might subscribe to stock, Sturges who was then introduced as Exhibit A—the practical partner who could make Allen's visions come true. This was Falkenstall's idea of how it should be done, and it was a good one because it made the most of each boy's assets. It had, however, a very curious effect on Sturges. The emphasis it put on Allen as the creative member of the partnership confirmed to Sturges that in the business he had chosen, the business of putting words together for sale, he was as unworthy as he suspected.

Sturges had, of course, deified *Facts, The Knowing Weekly*, even before it had been incorporated. A new belief in Letters had flooded in to fill the vacuum left by his lost belief in God. Nothing was more important to him, spiritually, than that he be worthy of his association with the great writers who, he was sure, would one day make their reputations in the vehicle that he and Allen were creating.

But the circumstances of its promotion denied Sturges any outlet for his regathered emotions. He was not even a minor priest in the new temple; his job was the janitor's. So he experienced again the same sensations of being bottled up that he had felt as a child when he had found no one to talk to about God.

This time, however, something happened to Sturges that

might have set him free, something that came very close to setting him free despite himself. He fell in love.

The girl's name was Joan Hadley and she was no relation to the man who had been President of Yale University.

Joan was a small, dark girl, whose really raven black hair was bobbed in a way that framed her olive-like face—olive shaped and almost the color of the softest, lightest-colored olive. Her eyes were very large for her face and very lovely. Her mother was an Italian and like her she might one day take on much too much weight, but then she was only twenty and her figure was round but without any fat on it. She worked all day in Malley's Department Store selling toys to the parents of children and in the evening she went out with Yale boys. She had a very bad reputation.

Sturges met Joan in Heublein's restaurant on the east side of the Green around which the little New England town of New Haven grew up. The boys she was with that night had got drunk and Joan had walked away from them to Sturges' table, where he was sitting alone waiting for Allen. She had simply sat down and said,

"I'm Joan Hadley. Those wet smacks make me sick. Can I sit down by you, maybe?"

The wet smacks were freshmen and did not follow Joan because they perceived that Sturges was an upper classman. He was immensely relieved by that, at least. He recognized Joan's name at once. It was well known on the campus that year.

Sturges believed everything he had heard about Joan so he was apprehensive—and excitingly pleased. He would never have had the courage to pick her up because of the jokes the boys made about her—Joan Hadley and Hot Stuff were synonymous terms in 1928—but his having her at his table definitely established him in a role to which he temporarily aspired. Now he was living high, as high, he felt, as any man could get, because Joan was the prettiest as well as officially the baddest of the young shop girls and waitresses who were then honoring the Yale students with their affections.

Sturges stammered and stuttered trying to live up to the occasion, and hoped that Allen would show up soon, not only so that he would have a witness that he was out with Joan Hadley but also so that Allen, who was more experienced at such things, could take over and perhaps get another

girl and arrange things. He would be quite willing, when the "other girl" was materialized, to resign Joan to Allen and to accept the blind half of the arrangement.

Sturges had, to date, been to bed briefly with two whores procured for him by Allen, and slept one night alongside a very drunken lady who did not recognize him in the morning and who threw up and cried and altogether left a very bad impression on Sturges. She had been another date that Allen had set up, complete with the reservation of a room in a house of assignation near the Savin Rock amusement park. Allen had told Sturges not to let the girl drink too much, but Sturges had been too enchanted with her easy affection to deny her anything and so, in the end, had got absolutely nothing for his trouble, not even the esthetic pleasure of seeing her undressed, for she had fallen asleep, a few seconds after being escorted upstairs, with all her clothes on.

Sturges was definitely not equipped with enough experience to see him through an evening with the notorious Joan Hadley, who would certainly expect him to know all the ropes. But, just as definitely, he was determined he would see some kind of an evening through. Finally along about 1 o'clock, Joan herself took a hand in the management of the business. She said:

"Say, what's eating you, Sturgey? Why do you wriggle around like that?"

Sturges had been explaining, with the detail of a script editor, the plot of a movie he had seen the night before, all the while fidgeting and twisting in his chair, keeping his eyes on restless patrol to pick up the first intelligence of Allen's coming.

"I dunno," said Sturges, starting as if he'd been caught at something naughty.

"I like you," said Joan. "You're cute. You don't drink much either. Would you like to go som'ers we could dance?"

She smiled a very sweet smile and put her hand on the table for him to hold. Something in her tone of voice made Sturges know that he would have a secret to conceal in the morning. The secret would be that he had been out with Joan Hadley and had *not* slept with her. But at least he had been seen in intimate conversation with her by a number of his classmates. If he kept his secret he would still get credit for an adventure with Joan herself, for he would now be

observed leaving the restaurant, and later the dance hall, with Joan on his arm, and her smiling happily up at him.

What Sturges did not know was that the fabric of Joan's reputation was largely woven of similar secrets, similarly kept, with here and there the scarlet thread of an outrageous lie, told in pure malice. The fury of the scorned male is less publicized than its female opposite number, but it is often just as venomous.

That is not to say that Joan was a virgin when Sturges first found her at his table in Heublein's, but it is to say that she was, by instinct and Catholic upbringing, a truly decent girl. She went out with Yale boys because she liked them and usually had fun. Her dark Italian eyes, and the high coloring under her olive skin, gave promises that were rarely kept and then only for sound reasons of real affection.

Sturges took her safely back to her home on Whalley Avenue that first night and many nights thereafter before Joan ever went to bed with him. When she did, it was an experience so different from Sturges' introductions to sex that for a while he was young and happy for the first time in a life he'd made grim for himself ever since he had first felt his unworthiness when he'd been a little boy.

Sturges and Joan began in the late fall of his senior year. After they'd known each other for several months, they began going away together on week ends to one of a dozen small inns within fifty miles of New Haven, in a car Sturges rented from a garage down on Congress Avenue. There they would live happily together for a few days, Sturges often cutting his Monday and sometimes his Tuesday classes. He could do this easily because his reputation as a serious-minded scholar was so well established and his marks were so high. Often his professors did not even turn in the cuts. As for Joan, she was quite willing to run the risk of losing her job; she was always careful never to burden Sturges with such a problem.

While he was with Joan, Sturges was almost relaxed. She seemed to know instinctively what was good for him. She let him talk a lot, even though she was not interested in much of what he said. She let him boast of his magazine; she celebrated his money-raising victories, bathing in the happiness that radiated from him when the future looked hopeful. She was easy, casual, genuinely affectionate, and when he

made love to her she was very responsive. Her grammar was bad, but she made up for it by the natural simplicity of the ideas she expressed and the fresh young quality her voice had. She seemed to ask nothing of Sturges or life, to take the world they lived in for granted, without aggressiveness or rebellion of any kind.

In the spring, Sturges and Joan found themselves going further and further away from the university town on each excursion. They drove for hours through the beautiful New England hills, taking byways and dirt roads that looked inviting. Often they did not talk to each other for long periods. Joan would ride silently by Sturges' side, curled a little toward him, looking very small and pretty and gay. She wore cheap summer prints she bought from the store for less than they cost customers. Sturges never bought her anything, even for Christmas; at Christmas he was in New York with his family.

Having been brought up a city girl, Joan exclaimed over all kinds of country phenomena, like cows herding together toward the barn in the evening or how land was plowed. She was fascinated, one day, when Sturges had to change a flat tire; she had never seen it done before and was surprised that there was nothing but air in a big automobile tire. Everything was new and interesting to her and this made Sturges feel almost superior to the girl he was still convinced must be much more worldly than he.

Joan never talked about what Sturges thought of as her past, so he never found out that so little of what he believed about it was true. But he knew that she was good, and by the time his graduation from the university was a few fortnights away, he was in love with her.

It had been so long since Joan had ever denied him anything that Sturges took her belonging to him for granted. He could do this because Joan was in love with him too, and had been for longer than he with her. Sturges did not think at all about what she felt. Neither did he realize that his hours with the little dark-haired girl were soothing because he was in love, and she was returning his love. So perhaps it was just ignorance that made him break her heart—and bankrupt his own for a long time.

Sturges broke Joan's heart by telling her that he was going to marry her and by making love to her, those last weeks,

with an intensity that he had never shown before, and then by telling her that he was not going to marry her after all, and in such a way that he successfully concealed two facts from her. One was that he had no real knowledge of what he was doing—no knowledge of the consequences, of what his renunciation would do to him or to her. The other fact he successfully concealed was how much he really cared for her, and how important she had become to him.

Sturges had no idea how much more of a person his love of Joan had made him. It is doubtful, for instance, that he could have clinched some of the deals that made his magazine possible at all if it had not been for some inner security that being in love and loved had given him. The rich fathers of the rich sons to whom Sturges and Allen Bishop had been presenting their plans for nearly a year now were impressed by Sturges in a way that would have astonished the instructors of his freshman year who had found him such a bumptious and objectionable boy. Joan never even had the wry satisfaction of knowing how much she had given Sturges, or what her love had helped him to accomplish. There was a magnetism to Sturges when he was in love of which he was wholly unconscious. Sturges killed that magnetism along with the natural boy and girl love that he and Joan had for each other, but by the time it was dead, he and Allen had a quarter of a million dollars in sight with which to start their magazine.

This is what happened:

Sturges told Joan he was going to marry her, impulsively. They were sitting by a roadside near Farmington, looking out across a road toward the willows which bent over a small stream. He'd been thinking of when the term would be over and he would go away from New Haven, back to New York where he and Allen would start their magazine. It was the first time he had thought of Joan's not being around, where he could call her to him whenever he felt the need for her. Joan had been very quiet after he'd told her, so quiet that later Sturges even tried to tell himself that maybe she had not really wanted to be married to him at all.

It was like the opening of a Pandora's chest to Sturges, thinking that first real thought of what his life would be like after he left Yale. The next day every bad fairy in the box was out to plague him.

Sturges' life with Joan had been a secret thing. After the

first weeks, they had never gone to places where other students and girls went. Only his roommate, Allen, knew that Sturges did not go home to New York on his week ends. But Allen was naturally loyal and discreet and Sturges' reputation was not one to encourage gossip about his amours. He'd been typed long ago as a slow fellow along those lines.

It had not been difficult for Sturges to keep his own secret because the weight of the charges against Joan was too great for him to hope to alter the world's opinion of her permanently, and besides, he himself saw no reason to disbelieve the gossip. When its inconsistency with the character of the girl he knew occurred to him, Sturges simply assumed that he had reformed her. He did find that he was tempted, now and then, to punch some careless campus talker in the nose, but each time he restrained himself. He asked himself, quite naturally, what good it would do anyway.

But now what he was actually contemplating was the acknowledgment of his relationship with Joan to all the world! Being no fool at all, he saw with aching clarity what the world he lived in would think of it. Alone he winced as he had never winced with her at the thought of Joan's "ain'ts" and "gee's" and "wet smacks." He had a wild moment when he thought of borrowing the money from his father and sending Joan away to school somewhere. The opinion of the world had never interested him before; his own hide was ridicule-proof, thick enough to defend him from anything that might be said about him. But no epidermis was thick enough to protect him from what they might say about Joan—and probably speaking the truth, he reminded himself grimly.

The last straw was Sturges' final consideration of what taking Joan to New York with him as his wife—or any other way—would do to his still-tenuous relations with the important men who had said they would help in backing his and Allen's magazine. After that thought, the idea of marrying or even continuing with Joan was as dead as a dead willow that can no longer even weep.

There is another way of explaining Sturges' decision. Facing his love for Joan was the first adult thing Sturges had ever done. It was love that was making him successful in life's first challenge: the problem of raising the money. This brought immediate and violent emotions of guilt, unconscious but all-powerful. These emotions caused him to rationalize the

impossibility of going ahead with any relationship at all, and immediately Sturges felt the necessity of castrating himself, and of killing Joan to remove forever the evidence of his sin.

After he knew that he was going to kill her, Sturges made love to Joan in an agony of despair. He forgot his precious magazine; he forgot everything but making love to Joan. He could not have enough of her as the hands on the clock circled slowly to the hour by which it had all to be over. The very morning of commencement found Sturges with Joan, on the porch of an inn just outside Meriden.

As he did with all the occasions of his life, Sturges made almost a ceremony of it. Joan had been telling him where she was going to sit in the big hall to watch him graduate, and that he had to hurry—really, darling—or you'll be late.

Sturges said, "Come here, Joan," and she thought he was going to kiss her. Instead he put both hands on her shoulders and sat her down in front of him, in a big wicker chair. There was no basket for the head.

He said, "Joan, I don't want you to come to the commencement."

He held up a hand to stop her interrupting.

He said, "There's no use in it. It will just take you longer to get over it, if you ever see me again. And there's no need. I am going to drive down to New York with Bishop this afternoon—and I won't be back."

He felt around for something else to say. He was not sure whether the head had been completely severed. He knew its large eyes were fastened on him and its mouth was slightly open, but he was looking above and beyond it to the steps of the porch down which he would go, feeling punished and free.

He said, "You've spent a lot of time with me and I guess I owe you something. I got some money at the bank when we were in town yesterday and it's here in this envelope."

He took a small bank envelope out of his side coat pocket and placed it carefully on the round table that stood beside the chair she sat in.

"I wish I could do more, Joan," he said.

Then:

"Maybe this is a little sudden, but I didn't want to spoil your fun before."

And:

"Well . . . good-bye, Joan."

He walked toward and past her, stepping over a light shawl she'd worn and which had now slipped to the floor below where her right arm hung motionless. It was a strong, round young arm. There was no sleeve on it.

Sturges stepped over the shawl gingerly, as if it had been a widening pool of blood. He did not look back and for several hours, as he expected, he experienced a sensation almost of elation. He had escaped. It was not until forty-eight hours later that he really began to hurt.

After seventy-two hours he could stand it no longer and he telephoned to Joan's house from a pay station in a drug store on Lexington Avenue. The telephone in New Haven did not answer and Sturges did not call again. The crisis of his pain had passed.

*Letia Takes Fifth Avenue*

THE INSIDE OF the Phelps house on upper Fifth Avenue looked like the pictures Letia thought she had seen in *Vogue* of the home life of Queen Marie of Rumania. It was full of the same improbable ugliness. All horizontal surfaces not used for standing or sitting were covered with numberless ranks of framed photographs of dressed-up people. The frames were mostly of silver, but a few were decorated in some hideous variety of plush.

Plush had also been used for upholstering Mrs. Phelps, and she was overstuffed with some flabby material. She had a high, thin, insistently kind voice.

Letia neither liked nor disliked either Mrs. Phelps or her house. She was simply curious about them both, now that they belonged to her. This was the most interesting difference between Letia's attitude toward her new surroundings and the attitude of most young women who marry into rich, established families. It never occurred to Letia that Mrs. Phelps thought of the mansion as still belonging to *her* even if the late Mr. Phelps *had* willed it to his only son.

Randy had waited a long time for Letia, and when Letia finally said she would marry him, she was accepting the offer of his name and all his worldly goods in exchange for her undivided attention. She began at once to live up to her part of the bargain and took for granted that he—and his—would live up to theirs.

Letia did not even realize she was making history, in a kind of way, when she met the first challenge to her self-assumed authority and vanquished it. It was before the wedding in St. Thomas', so Letia had no legal papers to back her up but only the courage of a conviction that her deal with Randolph was made, and the power of her personality to enforce it.

Being without experience, Letia's way of going about it was crude and afterwards she suspected that she had been much too brusque. But it had worked.

Randolph had taken her, beaming, for her first formal call on his mother. It was the second meeting of the two women—the first had been in a restaurant and Letia had spent it telling her prospective mother-in-law what she thought about the show business.

When she had first heard of Letia, Mrs. Phelps' not very original thought had been that she should offer Letia a bribe to go away some place and leave the Phelps alone. But Randolph himself had telephoned an announcement to the papers and her opportunity had passed before she'd had time to collect herself and organize an offensive. Now Mrs. Phelps thought only of how to preserve her own serenity from the invasion of such a flamboyant character as she was sure Letia must be. Prepared to get down to cases at last, she asked her son to leave the room.

"I am sure, Miss Long, that you are going to make my son very happy," Mrs. Phelps began when they were alone. "I expect he would have been better off with a home of his own a long time ago. I'm really a very fussy old lady."

"That's awfully sweet of you, Mother Phelps," Letia replied, looking around her with undisguised interest. "What a fascinating room. I shan't touch a thing in it."

"Ahem," said Mrs. Phelps, not quite sure what Letia meant by her last reference but in no doubt whatever about having been called mother. "It's very dear to me, you know. Your own home will be just as dear to you one day, I'm sure."

"But this is all dear to me now—already," said Letia, her eyes widening. "I wouldn't think of taking Randy away from it. You see, I wouldn't have agreed to marry Randy if I hadn't thought it over carefully. We'll do everything we can to make you at home here."

Mrs. Phelps had for sixty years been used to asserting herself by understatement and, when she was angry, by pointed kindness. She had been a Beekman before she'd married a Phelps. She was not really a tough character but only appeared so to the more sensitive of her servants and to social climbers. She snubbed a great many people simply because she had been trained to snub anyone of whom she was not sure. But nothing in her experience equipped her to meet this present situation.

She was startled into saying, "Really, Miss Long, I am the mistress here, you know. I don't think it's very nice of you to

talk to me as if this were *your* house." Her thoughts were fluttering like her hands.

"But this *isn't* your house." The astonishment in Letia's tone was genuine. "It's Randolph's house, Mrs. Phelps. I wouldn't think of asking him to live anywhere else." She paused.

"You haven't talked to Randy about this, have you?" Letia's eyes narrowed again. She thought to herself, "This preposterous old woman . . . does she really believe that I should hide out around the corner some place just so that she won't be bothered?" She felt anger rising in her.

"This is all very unfriendly of you, Mrs. Phelps," she went on. "It's my job to make your son happy and of course we're coming here to live. It's his house. It's our house; we belong here. But I shall do my best to make you comfortable all the same, and I should think you would be grateful for that.

"You know," Letia concluded, getting up and beginning to pace back and forth before the old woman, "now that it's mine, the Phelps' name means as much to me as it does to you. . . . I don't intend to let us get into a row and be talked about . . . and you and I are going to be very good friends. Do you understand me, Mrs. Phelps? . . . very good friends."

Letia's beauty could be frightening when she was angry. Instead of distorting her face out of shape, the emotion now made the young lines firmer, made her seem older and more mature. She looked very formidable.

Tears oozed up in Mrs. Phelps' eyes and she felt she wanted to run away and hide somewhere but there was no place left to hide, with this terrifying creature striding up and down in the most obvious possession of her own drawing room.

Letia stopped pacing and sat down on the footstool by Mrs. Phelps' chair. She took the old lady's wrinkled hands in her long cool fingers and looked straight into her eyes.

"You mustn't make me angry, Mother Phelps. That's the only thing you mustn't do," Letia said now, in a matter-of-fact tone of voice. "Don't you see that the last thing in the world that I want is not to get on with you? Now that's enough of all this. Shall we call Randy back? I want so for you to show me all over this wonderful house."

Later Mother Phelps tried talking to Son Phelps, but no matter how she put the case for keeping her castle, it came out as criticism of her prospective daughter-in-law. For this

Randolph was in no mood at all. He said, "I think it's very disloyal of you, Mother, to talk like that. It's not like you at all. It's difficult enough for Letia, coming into the family. The least you can do is to make her welcome here in her own house."

After that Mrs. Phelps began her adjustment to she didn't know *what* was going to happen. But practically nothing untoward did.

As always, Letia had spoken literally and without pose when she'd told Randolph's mother her attitude toward the Phelps' name. She took being the young Mrs. Phelps very seriously. She bought the clothes she would wear carefully, with an eye to what the Phelps' friends and relatives would think of them. She was attentive to the roster of these friends and relatives, and mastered her new Who's Who rapidly. When she moved into the Fifth Avenue house, she immediately established a working alliance with Towers, the butler and executive head of the house, by asking him the frankest and most direct questions about what she was expected to do next, whom she should ask to the house, what she should serve them, and—most important of all—how friendly she should be.

Towers was a formally trained English career butler who had come over to America, after the world war, to advance himself—he'd been only a footman then. He was a slight man, the snowy whiteness of whose hair had been premature once. He respected quality and accomplishment and Letia had both—the first in her good looks, the second in marrying a Phelps. Towers felt it was very sensible of her to ask him the kind of questions she did and he responded to any American who wanted to learn and who was not afraid of him. Rich as they were, most of the Americans whom Towers had served had been afraid of him because he was so coolly correct and so obviously sure of his values. He took to Letia.

Once Letia was Randolph's wife, Mrs. Phelps, Sr.'s attitude changed. Loyalty was part of her code and she would have made the best of a much worse bargain than her new daughter-in-law. Moreover, if there had been any doubt, fear would have held her in line for, after her first serious talk with Letia, Mrs. Phelps never got over being physically afraid of the younger woman. So Letia had two allies on whom she could depend.

The first thing that enraged Letia's new critics was that

they had so little material with which to work, for with Towers and the dowager Mrs. Phelps to advise her, she made few mistakes.

The wedding itself had been a little difficult. If Letia had been a more sensitive girl—or known Towers better then—she would have agreed to Randy's suggestion that they be married in the small chapel of St. Thomas', with only the families present. Randy had been a best man or an usher at weddings in St. Thomas' so often that it never occurred to him that it could be done any other place. He suggested the chapel because social shows tired him. It would have been perfect—chic and unassailable. But Randolph had made the mistake of taking Letia into the small cathedral which is St. Thomas' proper and, although she was not yet a vain girl, she could not resist the picture of herself coming down that long and stately main aisle, mounting the five steps that lead up to the impressive altar. To play St. Thomas' in New York is to play to the biggest time there is in American weddings. She instructed Randolph to arrange it.

That brought Letia's own mother and her husband briefly back into the picture. They had had their first news of Letia's engagement from Cholly Knickerbocker's column in the Hearst papers. It had to be explained to them that Randy was paying the bills for the wedding, including those for the reception across the street in the St. Regis. It had also to be explained to them—by Letia—that the presence of other relatives and family friends was not encouraged. It was not that Letia was ashamed of them but that she felt they would be inappropriate.

So on that day in late June, St. Thomas' was packed with Phelps, friends and retainers, and the absence of Longs on the left side of the aisle was noted and commented on. So also was Letia's coolness to her mother.

Either Towers or Letia's new mother-in-law could have written down an inventory of the people who would comment most maliciously. It would have begun with the names of all eligible young females who might have been in Letia's place—and their mamas, aunts, and female cousins. It would have continued, to include most of the wives of Randolph's contemporaries. These could hardly be expected to like their husbands' reactions when they first saw Letia's picture—one of the ones Orlando Hicks had had taken of her—reproduced in

the papers. There was a distinct whistling sound in these reactions to a theatrical photographer's version of the young lady who was about to become part of their world.

Towers would have perceived that this tide of malice was to be swelled by a current of gossip flowing from gentlemen's clubs, for Randolph was not the only member of the Racquet and Union Clubs whom Letia had rebuffed while she'd been interested in the young editor on *The New Yorker*. The others were neither as genuine nor as enamored as Randy.

So Letia was launched into a sea of malice, shallow and not very important as seas of malice go, but the first she'd encountered. It did not disturb her in the least.

Letia did not behave well merely to defend herself. She was conscientious about social things (which took a lot of the fun out of criticizing her) because she considered them part of her new job. This was very impressive in a girl as beautiful as Letia because it cast her in a role, those first years, which had humility in it, respect for conventions, and a patent desire to please. The gossip columns stopped writing about her because she made no news for them; even the society writers dropped her for a while because she made dull copy. There was peace in Westbury and on Fifth Avenue.

It didn't last.

If it had been up to Randy, it could have lasted forever. He was extremely pleased with his bride. Emotionally he asked little more of her after they were married than before. What he did ask, she gave in a friendly enough fashion. She listened to his talk about his stables, soon knew more about his horses than he did . . . and was careful not to let him know it. If Randolph was an unexciting lover, Letia would have been the last to protest, and it gave him new confidence to think—he *did* think, if not often—that he could keep so beautiful a woman contented.

It did not take Letia long to see that what bothered Randolph Phelps about the life he led was the conflict between his sense of obligation to his mother (and to the social world in which she was a practicing duchess) and his own tastes. These ran to an easier-going life lived among grooms and trainers and other people who liked horses as much as he did. In this area, Letia found an immediately effective function into which she could put her heart. She could, and did, relieve her husband of the chores of filial devotion in a social setting.

Actually it took several years for Letia to satisfy her intense curiosity about the world of the rich, so that when she took over responsibility for that part of her husband's life which was lived to please Society, she was only doing what interested her most.

Letia released Randolph from all his social obligations and did not require his presence at any but her most important dinners. She built up his extremely casual relationship with his racing stable—his trainer, Tom Clark, really ran it—until he himself thought it justified his doing what he liked to do. This was just to hang around there, basking in the easy atmosphere of the paddock, letting the time pass comfortably.

Having no jealousy whatever in his nature, Randy was undisturbed that so many men paid obvious court to his beautiful wife; in fact, her attraction for other men was a source of calm and continuing pleasure to him. It was very reassuring to own something that a great many other people wanted a great deal, and Randolph had no doubt whatever that he owned Letia.

It was also Letia's practice, whether from instinct or design, to throw her husband's way as many pretty girls as she could find. She knew he liked them around him and she would not have been disturbed if they had got further with him than they did. Her calm assumption that she had nothing to be afraid of was enraging to the women she knew, but not enraging enough to keep any of them from trying to steal her husband. When Letia finally decided to remove Randolph Phelps from her environment, she had actually to explain in some detail to Rosalie Goodblood how to go about taking him away from her. But by that time Letia had acquired considerable sophistication as well as an intimate knowledge of the workings of her husband's mind, and she was up to it.

It was four years after their marriage almost to the day that Randolph confessed to Letia, somewhat shakily, that he had been unfaithful to her for a number of months and that, all things being considered, perhaps it would be better if he married Rosalie.

It had taken Letia a little over a year to arrange that this speech should be made to her, so the actual lapsed time of her real marriage to Phelps was not the four years between the dates of their marriage and divorce but the first three years of that period of time.

Of these three years, Letia spent the first wholly preoccupied with becoming Letia Phelps. Precocious as she was, she could hardly have done it any sooner because it took a full year just to move the Phelps' establishment from one place to another through the seasons. After a honeymoon on which they hid away in Bermuda, they came back to Westbury. In August, Phelps' horses raced at Saratoga. Then they did a quick September in Bar Harbor and Letia came down with Towers to open the New York house. In January Letia discovered Palm Beach and vice versa. By February, Towers was on his way up to Georgia to see that everything was ready on the plantation there. In April, when Letia got back to New York, her surroundings were again for the first time familiar. She saw that the house on Fifth Avenue was now her home, and she began to have reservations about it.

During the second year of Letia's marriage, she was aware that none of the places she opened and closed so conscientiously really meant very much to her, but it did not cross her mind to do anything about it. She still felt she had made her life and now that life was running smoothly. She actually had fun doing the executive part of it with old Towers—seeing that everything was shipshape and that there would be no surprises.

What happened first to change things was that she and Towers became so good at it—one of the things he was grateful for was that he now had an able boss to work under—that the job of being Mrs. Phelps no longer provided an outlet for Letia's energies. As before, the first manifestation of impounded energy was a revived thoughtfulness. Everything about the first year had been new and in a way exciting. In the second year, Letia began to think about it.

The first thing Letia thought was that she was a rich woman. When they had come back to New York the first fall, Randolph had driven his wife down to the offices of the Phelps' estate which were then at 40 Wall Street. They had gone up to see Arthur Townsend who had been his father's secretary and was now the administrator of Phelps, Sr.'s will. Randolph was acting on Letia's suggestion that it was silly for her to have to get him to sign so many things, and to have to draw on Townsend almost daily for money to pay the servants and run the houses. Townsend was always the quintessence of politeness, but Letia had an aversion to asking anyone for

money, even her husband's employee who was always so willing to give it to her. So in Townsend's office they arranged that the estate would simply pay \$400,000 a year into her account in The Fifth Avenue Bank, in monthly installments, and Letia would run the Phelps' establishments herself.

One of the qualities that distinguished Letia from lesser mortals was that although she was only a few years away from collecting dimes and nickels in a piggy bank, large sums of money did not make her nervous. She was equally at home dealing in cents, dollars, and hundreds of thousands of dollars, seeing clearly that figures with a lot of zeros behind them mean no more to some people than figures with no zeros at all mean to others. This is the secret of most success stories involving the adjustment of individuals to different standards of living.

Letia was unaffected emotionally by dealing in large sums; money was money. She was good at figuring it and she had always been interested in it. Only a few months after she had been one of them herself, Letia had been able to estimate that it cost the Phelps almost \$400,000 a year to live as they did, and support their stable. Mr. Townsend had been impressed when they named that sum because he was reasonably certain that Randolph had no idea how much the family spent. When he said, "I think all of your expenses last year actually came to a little over \$356,000," Letia answered quite calmly that she thought \$400,000 would still do and that she wouldn't have to bother him again.

When the money first began to be deposited to her account in The Fifth Avenue Bank, Letia found it impossible to resist the temptation to take sometimes a thousand, sometimes two, out of the checking account and deposit it downtown in the Seaman's Savings Bank, where her earlier savings, compounding at four per cent, had reached the untouched sum of \$4,316.42. Letia had never made a withdrawal. After the teller at the Seaman's Bank for Savings informed her that they could not accept deposits in excess of \$7,500, she opened another savings account uptown, at the Bowery Savings Bank on 42nd Street. Then, as the money from the estate continued to be deposited to her checking account in amounts of \$33,333.34 a month, she decided she was silly about her savings accounts and simply let the balance in her checking account pile up whenever she and Towers contrived to make \$20,000 do the

work of \$30,000. She was very private about her figures at this period and Towers was under the impression that the Phelps' estate was not doing as well as it had been.

The first thinking Letia did about how rich she was began when she had thus saved—and she naturally considered the savings her own—nearly \$50,000. The direction of her first new thoughts about money were of what she got out of all she spent, of what she and her husband and her mother-in-law and one or two cousins who were dependents (they were paid directly by the estate) got out of it all.

In the first place, she decided they got an extremely comfortable life, and that such plays as she saw which made fun of rich people overlooked this so obvious fact. It was some trouble but still it was worth while to change residences so frequently, to be always where the weather was at its best at the time you got there, and just to have so many changes of scene.

Without being a gourmet—Letia had very little of the sensuous in her—she knew that the Phelps' chef was an exceptionally fine cook and that his cooking made a difference in the enjoyment of life. She actually preferred giving dinner parties at home to taking people even to restaurants like The Plaza and The Marguery simply because her own table was so much better, and this even though, under Towers' management, she had not had to learn enough about fine food to be able to order an exceptional dinner. But she was now sure that eating well was worth while, and that one had to be rich to eat well.

Letia was a little more used to expensive clothes; Randolph had made that possible some time before they were married. But it was one thing to be able to go into even the best shop on Fifth Avenue and order a few things you liked, and quite another to have a wardrobe kept by a really good maid—a Bergdorf Goodman's of one's own. Clothes had never meant enough to Letia for her to make important sacrifices for them; perhaps that was some function of her exceptional looks because she had the kind of a figure that looked well in anything she wore and people usually looked at her face and her hair anyway. But Letia now saw that there were people in the world who could cut an evening dress in such a way that it was as different and as more deeply satisfying as her own chef's food was from the food in any restaurant in New

York. She had always been genuinely interested in the design of clothes.

All these things, and she thought about them a lot, laid a foundation of hard conviction in Letia that money was indeed worth having—really lots of money. She also saw with equal clearness, only a year away from life in a two-room flat in West 53rd Street, that the deepest satisfaction of all about having money was having so much that one did not *have* to think about it. Thinking about whether one could afford something—for Letia—took a lot of the pleasure out of having it at all, even if it *could* be afforded.

Of the intangibles that the Phelps' fortune purchased, Letia thought nothing at all. Perhaps she had acquired social position with too little effort. Perhaps she understood instinctively that she was as superior to her new friends as to her old. The Phelps' society was a second- and third-generation society and Letia had yet to meet a male or female in it whose personality or accomplishments she really respected. The social position—the flattery and the envy and the ability to hurt—which certainly meant more than even the money itself to many of the women she now knew, left Letia untouched. The people who came to her houses, and to whose houses she went, who danced and drank and dined and swam and played tennis with her, she neither disparaged nor valued. If anything, the necessity of doing so many things for them was a nuisance.

Letia's first conclusion was that that part of her life—the social part—and her other chores, including being thoughtful of and accommodating to her husband, altogether constituted a very fair price to pay for the material benefits which resulted.

This conclusion did not last her long. Inevitably, in its wake came the corollary conclusion that if her material well-being depended on her doing her chores, then she would have, to insure it, to go on doing these chores for the rest of her life. And it was this conclusion that sat so badly with her.

Letia was married in 1927 and the 1929 crash overtook her just as she was becoming conscious of her problem. The crash itself had the effect of further shaking her confidence in her security as Mrs. Randolph Phelps. Conservatively invested, and well larded with government bonds, the Phelps' fortune came through in good shape, but most of the people Letia knew were hard hit.

After the crash, the captains of industry who gathered around Letia's swimming pool in Palm Beach were frightened men whose financial advice Letia instinctively mistrusted. She did accept her first lessons in high finance from them—for unlike the other women they knew, Letia always talked to men about their businesses—but these were lessons in what not to do. When she asked them such questions as: "But if you *knew* there was too much copper in the world, why did you go on mining it?" they never had answers which satisfied her.

Letia was not impressed by the permanency of wealth in the hands of such men. Nor was she encouraged, by what they told her, to try her own hand at investing her insignificant capital—in the hope of running it into a more substantial stake. Yet without her own money in her own name—and plenty of it—she was now aware that she would never feel really free.

For a long time it seemed as if the Phelps would be harder for her to shake than her original family had been.

It was Lucy Hartrampf who showed Letia the way.

Most of Letia's "friends"—the people whom she liked to see and who were really anxious to see her—were men. Men liked her for many other than the obvious reasons. Despite the sharpness of her questions, they liked her because she talked to them about the things that interested them most. All but a few of the too ambitious also liked her because they could look at her and be with her without feeling that they were called upon to make advances of some sort. The rich American male in the just-born Thirties was much too concerned with his survival to be emotionally adventurous and yet he found that most of the idle rich women he knew were bored unless he flirted with them. From Letia, he had at once the distraction of being with a beautiful woman and at the same time a kind of comfortingly sexless companionship. She was a great success with men, without benefit of flirtations.

But not all Letia's friends were men. As time went by, she ran across a number of women who were drawn to her for one reason or another. The women who approached her for purposes of advancing themselves socially, or for some other ulterior motive, she spotted instantly and not many of them amused her. But she was sought after by others out of honest curiosity or because she was so obviously competent and they

wished to lean on her. From amongst these she picked out a few who were useful to her in one way or another and made friends of them. Occasionally she was actually interested in one who was weaker and very much less able to cope with life, and out of this material she made protégées. Lucy Hartrampf was the last of a succession of protégées whom she attached to herself while she was still Mrs. Phelps.

Lucy appealed to Letia because, from a similar background, she had made a somewhat similar match and was doing very badly with it. Lucy came from an unassuming upper-middle-class family and had met John Hartrampf at a party to which a schoolmate had asked her out of pity and because her looks were an asset. She was a silly girl, fluttery, naïve, sensitive, and easily hurt. But she had ash-blond hair almost the color of Letia's, unusual eyes which were a deep violet, and a willowy young figure. She had been very thrilled to be at her friend's party. Her eyes shone with excitement and she was unusually responsive.

Young John Hartrampf fell in love with Lucy and she took him away from a number of other girls who wanted to marry him because the Hartrampfs were almost as rich as the Phelps, even though their money came from profits in patent medicines. Lucy fluttered through the most formal of introductions into society with a capital S—announced engagement, receptions, a wedding at St. Bartolomew's, and a great deal of being consciously built up by her husband's family—without having any idea about what to do about anything because all she wanted was someone to tell her how to please John, who was the only man she had ever known, a prince with plumes and altogether breath-taking.

John was still in his twenties and had nothing to do in the world but to find a way to spend his money in order to keep himself amused. It did not take him long to fall out of love with Lucy and to become fatigued by the institution of marriage. He soon found that other young women besides Lucy had ash-blond hair and that most of them knew much more than she about how to make him feel that living could be fun.

It was about this time that Lucy palpitated into Letia's boudoir late one afternoon, hard on the heels of a telephone call which had begun by her trying to explain why she and John would not be able to make dinner that evening after all.

Lucy had cried and cried and told Letia that she had to

tell *someone* because what had really happened was that John had brought another woman home with him that afternoon. He had calmly told Lucy that if she didn't like his friends she could go to any hotel she pleased, that he was tired of going to hotels himself when he had a perfectly good house of his own that was big enough for him to do anything he pleased in.

Letia was fascinated by this dramatic narrative and wanted to know first all about who the other woman was. From Lucy's description and the first name of Martha, Letia was reasonably sure that she was a girl on *Vanity Fair* who had been a friend of Joe's and who drank too much. She was very pleased with being able to make the identification. For the rest, her reaction to Lucy's predicament was matter-of-fact and rational.

Just exactly what *was* the situation? *Now?*

Lucy didn't really know.

Had Lucy ever talked to John about his other women?

No, of course not.

"But how in the world can you decide what to do if you don't really know any of the facts?" Letia asked. "The thing to do is to find out just where you stand and then we'll decide what you should do."

Lucy was very reassured by this unemotional approach. John, it turned out, was as repentant as could be the next day and sent his wife a bracelet with both diamonds and emeralds in it. He had ordered it by telephone from his club, apparently feeling so thoroughly in the wrong that he could not even face a personal conversation until he had prepared the way.

Letia was immediately impressed that, as far as Lucy was concerned, this was a most desirable frame of mind for John to be in. She told Lucy to accept the gifts, say nothing, and to wait for the enemy's next move. Orlando Hicks would have been thrilled; Letia was every inch the general.

Lucy was only too anxious to continue in the role of obedient troops, and for many months John Hartramt was successfully outmaneuvered by an unseen and unknown opponent who was playing the game purely for the love of it. Letia ordered Lucy\* in and out of her own house as she felt the situation called for her presence or absence. Large sums of Hartramt's money were spent on munitions of war procured at various ordnance depots along Fifth Avenue and on 57th Street, and out of her own resources Letia marshaled the male

auxiliaries necessary for counterattacks. She saw to it that Lucy always had an alleged suitor in attendance to keep her from seeming unwanted by anyone. Over a period of months, the loot taken was considerable, a succession of messengers bringing in parcels from Cartier's and Udall and Ballou, Gunther's and Hattie Carnegie.

Lucy always brought the latest around to Letia to comment on and to appraise and Letia was always totally unmoved by Lucy's plaintive question, "But what *good* is it all? Poor John, he must feel terrible. Where's it all going to end, Letia?"

"John only feels terrible these blue Mondays," said Letia. "He's having a perfectly good time and can afford it."

"But I don't want any more of his presents. I want him," Lucy would say. "Oh, Letia, darling, I feel just terrible."

At this Letia would read Lucy another little lecture, rising like a general from behind the battle maps to renew the confidence of a doubtful field commander.

But finally it wore thin. A more formidable adversary appeared in the person of a woman who got the story of what was happening to him out of John, and who sent him back to his wife one day, not with a present from Cartier's but with a request for a divorce. At this, Lucy was so upset and became so hysterical that Letia was really disgusted with her and would not see her at all during the whole four months it took Lucy to cry her way through her sessions with the lawyers and her family and be packed on a train to Nevada with only a cousin and a maid to accompany her.

During this period, Letia gave up her extracurricular activity of giving advice and went back to a season exclusively devoted to the social comings and goings that she was finding increasingly flat. But after Lucy returned from Reno, Letia's curiosity inspired her to look up her damaged friend. She found Lucy installed in an extremely habitable suite in Pierre's, sharing its conveniences with the cousin who had returned from Reno with her. Lucy had no reproaches for Letia, but she was as woebegone as ever.

"That horrible woman is marrying him," said Lucy.

"Well, whatever did you expect?" asked Letia. "You're certainly going to get married again yourself, aren't you?"

"No, never," said Lucy. "People have been terribly sweet to me, Letia, but I just can't bear it."

"You'll have to get married," said Letia practically. "You don't think you could look after yourself, do you?"

"Oh, I've got to do *something*, I know. But, of course, I don't have to worry about money."

"What do you mean, of course you don't have to worry about money?" Letia asked. Divorce settlements were no secret to her but it never occurred to her that Lucy could have driven even a reasonable bargain for herself. Lucy's original instinct had been to try to send back the presents John had sent her. She had insisted she would never accept alimony.

"I mean they made me take the money," said Lucy. "But what good is it all to me?" with a helpless wave of her hand.

"They made you take what?" Letia asked.

"I think the settlement was five something—hundreds of thousands—I think. Poppa's lawyers took care of it all. Oh, it was terrible. They made John terribly angry and he came to me and asked me to stop them wanting so much and I told Poppa what he said but Poppa wouldn't do anything about it."

Letia said, "Why you utter idiot!" and found that she was so irked by Lucy's imbecile attitude that she took hold of the girl and shook her.

What she said to Lucy did the latter a service. In her impatience with Lucy, Letia finally got through to her with the simple realities, which were that neither she nor John had been emotionally hurt, that John now had a woman who was surely more suited for him, and that she, Lucy, was still young, pretty, and in good health—and was the mistress of a small fortune. To acquire as much, many men had had to build factories and work whole lifetimes. Even if that in itself wasn't important to Lucy, the money meant that she was now free to live as she pleased and to find, out of all the millions of eligible men there were in the world, that particular idiot who had no more to him than Lucy, and so could reasonably be expected to be happy with her.

Letia also did herself a service, for in explaining the facts of her position to Lucy, she cast the light she needed on her own problem. Her earlier management of Lucy's affairs, she saw, had been so effective that even Lucy had not been able to avoid good fortune when it came to a showdown. If she had given one tenth as much thought to managing her own affairs. . . .

Walking uptown from Pierre's to the Phelps' house, her

first indignation at Lucy's childishness giving way to amusement, Letia saw how blind she had been to her own possibilities. She saw that but for the different kind of man that John was, there was no real difference between where she found herself and where Lucy had been before she had been taught how to capitalize on John's indiscretions. Letia saw that she was not irreplaceable to Randy and that with just a little manipulation, he would be made to see this too. She knew that the Phelps' estate could stand being separated from a much larger sum than the Hartrampf family had been separated from in Lucy's interest, and with just as beneficent results for all concerned.

Letia saw it all with crystal clarity, as a general who has been puzzled by the problem of the enemy and the terrain in front of him suddenly understands the map that he has spent so many hours studying, and knows that a thrust here will bring a reaction there and that then, by going up this particular valley here, it will be all over and he will have impressed his will on the enemy.

Letia did not have to move a single division to begin carrying out her plans. All the necessary troops, both enemy and friendly, were in the positions that were necessary for her success. She had been married to Randolph Phelps for a little over three years. She was the most important of all his possessions, but he was now used to owning her and he had no real understanding of how much of the simple pleasure he got out of life was the direct result of her good management. He might have fought really hard if anyone had tried to take Letia away from him. He might have turned mean if she had tried to leave him. It would have hurt him dreadfully. It would have dissolved the whole fabric of his confidence in himself. But it was perfectly conceivable—it was not only conceivable, it was highly probable—that he had owned her long enough now so that he would trade her for a similar possession if he thought it more desirable, as he would trade the best race horse in his stable for a better, or even for a horse that was no better but that was new and had possibilities which caught his unvital fancy.

The material for such a trade in wives existed in the person of Rosalie Goodblood, whom Randy had known all his life. Rosalie had been his first sweetheart but she had been too familiar then. She herself had always been interested in Randy.

When nothing had come of it, she had married a friend of his. From this friend, she was only recently divorced.

Like Letia, Rosalie was a striking woman. Physically she was almost a perfect foil. She had dark hair and high color. Letia had the figure of a fast filly; Rosalie was more like one of Phelps' best jumpers—broad and strong but beautifully proportioned.

Rosalie had been one of the unusually pretty women whom Letia had thrown her husband's way, simply as Standard Operating Procedure, to keep him amused. She was well aware that Rosalie was predatory, wanted Randolph, and saw no reason why she, Rosalie, could not get him on her second try.

All it would take—by this time Letia's determined stride had brought her almost to her doorstep—all that it would take would be for her to get into Rosalie's head how to go about it. Rosalie had no creative imagination whatever. She could never think out how to change her tactics all by herself. As long as Rosalie continued to cast herself in the role of Randy's boyhood friend, he would be as used to her, and as unexcited by her, as he had been as a boy. But Rosalie *was* intelligent enough to carry out a plan—if she were given one—and she had the natural energy and the persistence to jog Randolph out of his old attitude toward her.

Considering risks, Letia did not think that Rosalie would be vindictive enough to make it difficult for her. In fact, thought Letia, it will be just the other way around. Rosalie is the kind of a girl who will be grateful.

She was.

Letia conveyed her plan to Rosalie by pretending to confess the advice that she, Letia, was giving someone else. The tactics were explained in detail. When Rosalie was uncurious about who the mythical principal was, Letia knew that Rosalie understood what was going on just as well as she did.

Letia was not then being moved by emotions of any violence, at least on the surface. Down inside of her there was that same drive to be free from her environment and independent of it that she had had when she was a young girl. And perhaps to rid herself of the male who had nominal authority over her. But now that drive was adjusted to a very complicated reality, a reality which called on all her faculties to manipulate. During that last year of her marriage to Phelps, Letia played a part in real life as she could never have played

a part on the stage, unless the stage could, by some miracle, have offered a comparable reward.

As, from the day she walked home from Pierre's, Letia moved by slow and successive steps toward her goal, she felt a sense of accomplishment which was its own reward and which kept her personality in balance.

She had an alarm once when Rosalie's personal interest showed signs of straying to the young man whose father trained Phelps' horses. Letia took the young interloper out of play personally, sending him to buy horses in South America, dizzy with the remembrance of how his father's wonderful patroness had looked at him when she had come all the way down to the boat to see him off. Rosalie's dark beauty attracted all kinds of men and, after young Clark, Letia kept her eyes on the field to protect her entry from unfair competition.

But mostly Letia did not have to worry because Rosalie had made up her mind long ago that she wanted to be Mrs. Phelps.

For her own part, Letia had simply to redouble her interest in her mother-in-law's affairs. She blossomed as the chairman of a score of charities, presided with Mrs. Phelps over Westbury's annual antique show, and otherwise carried her interest in the Phelps' world beyond the point where it was a relief to Randy from his obligations and well into territory in which it was easy for her to make a prime bore of herself. The luncheons and dinners and openings at which she now simply *had* to have his attendance multiplied and Randolph seemed to find it more and more difficult to disentangle himself from them or even to catch old Towers' eye to get an extra drink for himself while they were going on.

Gradually, gradually, everything worked out according to plan, and Letia felt better and better about it. When her marriage with Phelps came to an end, it was not simply that Letia found herself for the first time the mistress of a real fortune of her own but also that she felt satisfied because she had developed her natural capacity for making things happen the way she wanted them to. Up until then her life had been opportunistic but now she was beginning to see what could be made of it by her own efforts—not simply what tangible rewards could be gotten out of it but what intangible satisfac-

tions there were in mastering one's environment, in making it yield what one wanted of it, as a result of one's own efforts.

Letia had never lost touch with Orlando Hicks and took his advice to get herself a lawyer who could talk with the Phelps' lawyers on terms of equality. She hired the firm of Wood, Wickersham, Root, Sullivan and Taft to do the job.

It is very unusual for Wood, Wickersham to take a divorce case, but snowy-haired old Mr. Wood himself was so impressed with Letia personally—and she was so obviously the young and innocent victim of a rich man's caprice—that he agreed to have his firm represent her. He was even more impressed when he found that the word "represent" was meant literally. He was the first of a succession of individuals in his firm who would learn that Letia required no original thinking of her associates, having always done all the thinking necessary before she made her arrangements to use them.

Of course, this could have offended a firm like Wood, Wickersham, Root, Sullivan and Taft, had it not been for the fact that Letia's ideas were so sound legally, financially, and emotionally, and had she not been so refreshing a sight that everyone in the firm felt more cheerful after she had passed through their chambers.

With the aid of Wood, Wickersham, the settlement that Letia got from the Phelps Estate was \$2,000,000 in negotiable securities.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *Sturges Faces Facts*

THE LAST MONTH he was at Yale—and nominally still in New Haven—Sturges Strong had let himself get out of touch with his partner. Most of those hectic weeks, they'd been roommates in name only. But Allen Bishop had not wasted the time. Sturges had plenty of news to hear from him in New York when they met for the first time as graduates of the class of '29.

In the first place, Allen had got himself engaged to be married, and Sturges was nettled to note that they who had been two against the world were now three: Allen and Sturges—and Mary. They were, in fact, almost four, so frequently did Allen now refer to the name of their lawyer, James Aloysius Falkenstall.

But even more important was the conclusion of Allen's narrative of what he'd been up to. "And so it looks," he said, "... hold your breath, Sturgeon—and so it looks as if we were going to get the money—all of it. I *think* we're in business."

Although the account had been somewhat incoherent, it did not take Sturges long to see that the three main themes in Allen's conversation—Mary, Falkenstall, and the last money's being in sight—were much more than casually connected.

Mary's last name was Van Voort. It was Falkenstall who brought Allen and Mary together and began the final cycle of good fortune.

Falkenstall was a young Californian whom the august firm of Wood, Wickersham, had tried out on the luncheon-table theory that they could use young blood from some other law school than Harvard. Falkenstall rewarded them by becoming more Harvard than the oldest graduate in the firm. He even took to quoting remarks of Felix Frankfurter which had reached him third hand, to suggest that he'd been one of Felix's bright boys himself. He had a wide bland face, easy, attentive manners, and he was very pleased to be in New York and with Wood, Wickersham. His name was up for the

Racquet Club and he had already decided to marry a niece of Vandemeer Van Voort's. Mary, who was Van Voort's daughter, was too young; she was still at Vassar.

Vandemeer Van Voort was the chairman of the board of an important chemical company. He sat at a big polished desk with no papers on it and frowned at visitors. He always told them that he kept the top of his desk clear so that there would be nothing on it "to obstruct the ideas of young men, welling up through this desk, enriching and renewing the very air I breathe." Van Voort had originally enriched that air by some adroit sleight-of-hand long after his own youth had passed. Then, as a medium-placed employee of a board charged with handling enemy alien patent rights during the First World War, he had managed to abstract out of the air certain secrets which he presently sold for stock in the company he now headed. In his extreme youth he'd worked in a drug store. But his late wife had been related to some of the best families of New Haven.

Van Voort's company was one of Wood, Wickersham's clients and young Falkenstall was the junior who then did Van Voort's chores. By the spring of 1929, after Allen's classmates—the ones he knew best, the ones with whom he'd been at Hotchkiss—had indicated that their parents might put up half of what Sturges told them that Facts, Inc., would need, Falkenstall suggested that Allen approach Van Voort for the rest. Falkenstall felt that he was almost a partner in *Facts*. He would introduce Allen to Van Voort.

Sturges, Falkenstall concluded, would never do for the first meeting. Falkenstall said frankly that, even at his best, Sturges was too opinionated and that Van Voort only liked opinions which came up to him through his polished desk and thus belonged to him without need for negotiation. Falkenstall's instinct was sound. Only Allen's charm kept the Van Voort door open after the first meeting. Clearly, Van Voort thought that Facts, Inc., was a lot of nonsense, but he let himself ask young Bishop out for the week end at Greenwich and agreed to look over the dummies that had been prepared.

Charm or no charm, Van Voort would never have committed himself except for Mary. Mary was Van Voort's only child. She was a serious-minded, very conscientious girl, literal and objective. She had a pretty figure, soft brown hair, and big ingenuous blue eyes. At twenty, she looked frailer than

she was—she studied too long and argued too late into the nights. Underneath, she had her father's tough constitution. There is no telling exactly what attracted Allen to her—he knew many prettier, some richer, and lots of more attractive girls than she. Probably it was the Keep Off the Grass signs that her father seemed to have stuck up all around her.

Mary always came home from Poughkeepsie for Saturdays and Sundays in Greenwich and it was there that she and Allen met late in May. She had hardly been introduced to him before Allen perceived that the Van Voort household had been highly organized to defend Mary from predatory males. The governess who had brought her up was still in Van Voort's employ, kept on hand for such occasions as Allen's visit. This female dragon hovered always within earshot. Van Voort had a male secretary, a sourpuss named Josephs, who must have had instructions to engage Bishop in private conversation whenever he might have a moment free to investigate Mary. The two butlers and the chauffeur were obviously in on the conspiracy. Even the gardener seemed on guard from behind the rosebushes.

It was all so obvious that by Sunday afternoon Allen got mad and asked Mary in a loud clear voice if she would like to go for a drive with him in her car. This surprise attack carried the day over inadequate protests from the governess. Josephs, the secretary, was upstairs with Mary's father.

Once he was alone with Mary, Allen was agreeably surprised. He had expected a girl as pretentious as her environment. Mary had no pretensions at all. He was charmed by her freshness, her simplicity. He told her all about *Facts*, *The Knowing Weekly*. It was a wonderful idea, she said. She asked Allen, timidly, if he would give her a job on it. It was just what she wanted to do, to work on a magazine after she graduated in June.

He said, "Gee, you bet. We'll need lots of girls—to be researchers—the way they are at *Time*."

Mary said, "But I know lots of girls who would be dying to work for you if they knew about what you are going to do. Would you let me organize your research staff for you, would you?"

Allen was moved to answer, "Gee, you're swell," and to mean it very much.

They felt already like partners.

After that week end, although Allen did not know it, a firm of private detectives was engaged to look into his background and the background of his parents. There was even an attempt made, early in the summer of 1929, to frame him with a female detective disguised as a girl of low character. Allen, however, was too full of *The Venture* by then to be interested in girls, however low their character. Besides, he had fallen in love with the head of his new research department and had asked her to marry him.

Mary had it out with her father before she accepted him. Regretfully, Van Voort called off his dogs. He also put up the rest of the money which Allen and Sturges still needed. Mary could be just as stubborn as her father; she believed in Allen and *Facts* and besides, there was an urge in her now of which she was unaware but which was very compelling. When she kissed Allen, she meant it. Reluctantly, as part of the price, she agreed to her father's stipulation that her marriage to Allen not take place until *Facts* could support them both—on its *earned* income. The fairness of this, she understood; she had been brought up with a great respect for what was earned. She agreed to wait.

That, Allen didn't like. He remained exceedingly impatient. His father was willing to give him \$50 a week; he could legitimately draw at least as much more from *Facts*. That was plenty for them to start on.

"I'm sure it is," said Mary. "But I can't do it. I gave my promise. It's the principle of the thing. And besides, Father's done everything for us."

Mary did not make it any easier by also explaining, under other circumstances, that the principle of the thing was also involved in her coming eventually to his bed still a virgin. Mary had a very strong sense of what was orderly and right and she was one of those rare rich Episcopalian children who take their religion seriously. She had a real, live conscience.

All these things, but principally the authority of her father standing guard over an implicit prohibition, made her say no to consummating her relationship with Allen. There was, however, nothing in her code that kept her from torturing herself and him by the most intimate rituals of sex short of the act itself.

In due course, as the summer before *Facts'* appearance sped by, both Mary and Allen grew bad tempered with one an-

other and they threw themselves more and more wholly into the physical tasks involved in playing magazine—for that is what the venture seemed like at first to its professional contemporaries.

The capital that Allen's father had told the youngsters they should raise was \$250,000. He named that figure for 1929, after Sturges had told him that Hadden and Luce had got by on less than half of that, starting in the first depression to follow the World War. Allen's father subscribed to the old adage that the time to start a new business is in a depression and he said he was sorry his kid had to start in a year like '29. He did not know how soon conditions would fulfill his prescription, and of course neither did anyone else—really—or Allen and Sturges would never have gotten their money. It was by purest coincidence that, having graduated in June, they named October 15th as the date by which they would call the last of the pledges which Falkenstall had seen to it that each prospective investor signed.

Thus it was that the \$250,000 cash was all safely deposited in a bank fourteen days before Black Tuesday on the Stock Market.

The Monday after Black Tuesday, of course, was the day that *Facts* made its first appearance on the news stands. Instead of celebrating, the whole staff sat glumly around wondering what would become of them if the world they had grown up in were permanently deflated. Besides, the facts in Vol. I, No. 1 of their factual magazine looked very silly indeed now, being all out of date because they had gone to press believing all the fine statements that had been issued about how "fundamentally sound" the market was.

Not one of their families but had suffered serious reverses in the week just passed, for practically all of them were boys and girls from the right side of the railway tracks. It was on the right side, of course, that the train had first run off the rails. To a number of them, their employment on *Facts*, *The Knowing Weekly*, which had begun as a lark, would soon be a grimly serious business on which their eating depended. They were sad young people who sat around on the desks they had spread out over the big loft in East 30th Street to make it look fuller and more important.

There were six editors in all, all but one of them classmates

of Sturges and Allen. Jimmy McNulty, the outlander, had graduated from Dartmouth two years earlier and was the only "professional" on the staff. He had been a reporter for Harold Ross on *The New Yorker's* "Talk of the Town" Department for six months. McNulty had seemed a natural to Allen to run *Facts'* "Facts About New York" Department, which then aspired to condense all the facts in *The New Yorker*, as well as New York's nine papers, into two pages a week. McNulty was a big, buoyant lad who operated a face as mobile as Ross's own under an umbrella of bright red hair. He was the only member of the original editorial staff who was destined one day to have an important voice in the affairs of Facts, Inc. The others would fall by the wayside one by one.

Besides the six editorial assistants, there were in *Facts'* loft that morning the eight young girls whom Mary Van Voort had recruited. The average salary of the male assistants was almost \$40 a week, but Mary had persuaded her girls to work for less than half that because their families were so much richer. The original roster included one Mellon, two Du Ponts, and a cousin of the Rockefellers. Mary set their starting salary at under \$20 a week and begrudged them every penny of it. Now they were huddled in the far corner of the room, not because they were more depressed by the news than their male associates but because Mary had impressed on them that *Facts*, *The Knowing Weekly*, was a very serious undertaking and that they were not there to be either seen or heard but solely to gather facts as requested by memoranda in duplicate, one copy for her desk. Replies would be double-spaced on the typewriter and she hoped to goodness these would be clearer than the kind of things they used to publish in the *Vassar Miscellany News*. They would wear skirts that came at least four inches below the knees, white shirtwaists *with* sleeves, and they would kindly see that their hair was neat. Mary did not say in so many words that they were not to date the writers, but she left no doubt as to her position on the subject.

On the other side of the invisible chalk line, Allen Bishop made his own speech to the writers.

"We're not going to call the girls 'researchers,'" he said. "They are Fact-Finders. That's more specific. They are to be just what the name implies—and no more. Sturges says we

can't afford secretaries, and there is no need for any of you to have an assistant. Each desk will have one Fact-Finder assigned to it but all requests for facts will be addressed through Mary Van Voort. She is the one who is responsible for fact-finding around here."

Sturges, who was present, nodded. "And I think it would be more appropriate to use last names around here," he volunteered. "Not Miss So-and-So. Just So-and-So."

Mary, of course, everyone called *Miss Van Voort*.

This Monday morning, the morning on which Vol. I, No. 1 of *Facts* had appeared, she alone seemed anxious to get the staff back to work. Even Allen was momentarily stunned and Sturges' morale seemed beyond repair. He and Allen had the only two private offices on the floor, two ten-by-ten spaces partitioned off, adjoining, in one corner. Allen had the one with the window in it, Sturges the office that included a door to the back corridor up which *Facts'* other executives could come from the Circulation and Advertising offices on the floor below. This was his front door; Allen's led into the editorial department.

Now all the business executives were present with Sturges in Allen's office. There were three of them. There was Joe Schulberg, the circulation manager; Myron Brennan, who hoped to sell advertising; and little Johnny Fairstreet who had been runner-up to Sturges for business managership of *The Yale Daily News*. Johnny was now Sturges' assistant in whatever Sturges needed assisting in at the moment.

Brennan was an Irish boy, a New Haven townie whose guile and persistence had made him manager of a Yale football team despite his beginnings as the youngest of nine children of a father who was a local politician. He had gone through Yale on nimble fingers and a scholarship. He stole ties, shirts, socks, and accessories, from classmates and local stores impartially, with a kind of Robin Hood approach. The rich, he felt, owed the less well-endowed a living. With a politician's eye for the main chance, Myron always attached himself to the right people. At Yale, one of them had been Allen. Now that he was working for Sturges, he had begun to shift his allegiance and to learn as fast as he could what little Sturges knew about selling advertising. The two and one third pages of advertising in Vol. I, No. 1 of *Facts* had

been put there by agencies who hoped to please some one of *Facts'* important stockholders.

Joe Schulberg was yet another protégé of Allen's, a Jewish boy whose parents lived at the Plaza Hotel. It was Schulberg who had thought of the phrase, "*The Knowing Weekly*." At Yale he had contributed more to the humorous *Record* than to *The News* and he hoped someday to be an editor at *Facts*. It was, however, already understood that *Facts'* editors should be more serious-minded than Joe, and he had had to content himself with writing letters touting the virtues of serious-minded editing.

Schulberg's letters went to the lists of prospective subscribers that Sturges bought from a mail-order list house, and they were very good even in the early days. They made the reader feel that he would have a big jump on his neighbors if he would subscribe to *Facts*, that he would really *know* what was going on and be able to impress others with his conversation. Joe was very persuasive in letters and his sales arguments were always based on some kind of snob appeal.

The average salary of these senior executives of *Facts, Inc.*, was a little higher than the average salary of the editors. It was a dollar or two over \$50 a week. Their average age was twenty-one.

Sturges, their Chief Business Executive, now felt called upon to address them. He was very frightened himself for he could almost feel the money oozing out of *Facts'* bank account, running away in little rivulets, being scooped out in big dippers full. He thought of *Facts'* bank account as a barrel they had managed to fill once but would never be able to fill again. They had printed 50,000 copies of the first issue of *Facts*, but only 8,000 of them had been mailed to people who had answered Joe's letters and the rest the American News Company had put out on the stands where they now lay waiting the hard test of public opinion.

Theoretically, at the rate they were spending money, *Facts* could continue to come out for a whole two years—over one hundred issues. But *Facts'* appearance on the week end of the crash was Sturges' first encounter with adversity. Vol. I, No. 1 was also, to all of them, their first adventure with commercial reality. They were all suddenly aware that one could get hurt where they were. Everything around them being un-

familiar, they had no way of estimating the odds on their survival.

Sturges, who was more scared than any of them, said:

"Look, maybe we get all the news stand copies back. So what? Maybe it's a good thing that nobody sees Vol. I, No. 1. Frankly, fellows, it stinks. It's got to be a lot better and Editor Al is going to make it a lot better. What you fellows don't realize is that bad news is just as good as good news in this business. People will want the facts about what's happening in Wall Street. And we can sell them the facts."

At this, he pounded on the table to reassure himself.

"Now let's really get to work. Let's burn up the track. Let's show 'em."

To set an example he strode back into his own room and began conspicuously to make notes on a sheet already full of figures. The show was over and the group dispersed.

Mary thought Sturges had handled the situation brilliantly. Work was her own prescription for the blues. She stayed in the room with Allen after the others had gone and he put his arm around her shoulder when she came over to where he was standing by the window.

"Why don't you go to work, too, Allen?" she said. "Sturges is right. That's what we've all got to do."

"Sturges isn't right about anything except that this is a lousy magazine," said Allen bitterly. "We're just a lot of kids. We read like a high school paper. I'm going out and get a drink, baby. I want to think about it. You keep house till I get back."

The thinking that Allen did was exceptional for a boy of twenty-one who was not a genius, but who was simply intelligent and sensitive. He resisted the temptation to tell his writers to imitate *Time*, which was already successful. Instead he told them to think for themselves and to tell their stories as if they were explaining the news to a girl next to them at a dinner party. He said, "Think of a pretty girl that you're trying to impress. It's a big dinner party and she will only listen to you a few minutes before the man on the other side will want to talk to her. So you've got to get your point over fast. You're a great authority on the subject yourself. You know all there is to know about it. But you've got to pick out, out of everything you know, just those facts which will keep her attention. And you've got to be amusing about it, too—

above everything else, you want her to think you're fun to talk to."

Allen also told them to stop reading newspapers and to get their material from the Fact-Finders who read the newspapers, so that they wouldn't unconsciously imitate the formula in which news stories are written. He broke down Mary's system for requisitioning facts, insisting that his writers speak directly to their Fact-Finders, cross-questioning them until they both had the story clear in their minds. He told them they could begin their stories wherever they liked—at the beginning, the middle, or the end—so long as it was a good story they had to tell.

More and more preoccupied, Allen wrote less and less himself, but gradually it happened; *Facts* became a magazine. In the beginning there were whole issues in which nothing came out right. Then there were one or two pieces in an issue that had real clarity and life. Gradually a style began to emerge. Writing in *Facts* had the hard condensation of *Time* but it had also some of the charm and the story-telling quality of the less whimsical pieces in *The New Yorker*. It began to be a really readable way to find out what was going on in the world. It was objective, those days, because Allen had no other purpose than to make it clear and readable. It was personal, not as a journalistic trick, but because Allen liked and was curious about all kinds of people. It had taste and no affectations.

But before *Facts* had and became all these things, the one hundred weeks for which they had money in the bank were almost gone. *Facts* had only got back half of the copies that had been put out for sale that first week. Even right after the crash there was curiosity about the new magazine. Fifty thousand dollars had been spent to publicize it. But of Vol. I, No. 2, they sold exactly one copy out of ten. From the subscription department, more and more letters went out each spring and fall mailing season, and the returns on them were surprisingly good because the letters Schulberg wrote described a magazine that the editors were a full five years away from being able to develop. But the renewal rate was terrible. Hardly anyone seemed to want to stay for a second ride on the *Facts*' merry-go-round.

Actually, the turning point in *Facts*' circulation curve came a little after it was a year old, but the magazine continued to

lose money for a long time thereafter. Allen had managed to quadruple his staff and had even hired some writers for as much as \$125 a week, which was a ridiculous salary for a new publication, munching its way through its capital in the midst of an historic depression. Editorial costs were way up despite the depression; neither Allen nor Sturges had been experienced enough accurately to forecast what they would have to spend. Moreover, on the business side, Sturges was stuck with contracts for paper and printing which he had signed before the deflation had begun.

After the turn in the circulation curve came, where another group might have relaxed a little, the now prematurely aging young men and women whom Sturges and Allen led were driven to redouble their efforts. Sturges drove them directly, occasionally by pep talks but more often by personal example and by the direct demands he made of them. Allen drove his writers in another way. There was no apparent discipline in his life or the working hours he required of them. But he had now made writing for *Facts* into a crusade. Allen's writers drove themselves harder than even Sturges was able to drive his less creative employees.

The only semblance of social life at Facts, Inc. revolved around the threesome that Sturges, Allen, and Mary had become. They usually lunched, and almost always dined, together, and you would have said, watching them, that a kind of camaraderie had grown up amongst them. But though sometimes Allen got them talking about themselves and what they felt and thought, almost every topic of conversation was grist for one of their professional mills and thus led them back to shop talk.

But something personal among them was happening just the same. Allen uncovered it. On *Facts'* first anniversary, Allen felt he was still five years away from mastering the job of getting out the kind of a magazine he wanted, but by now he had a very clear picture of what it would be like. He also knew, as neither Sturges nor Mary knew, that the process had begun—that their eventual success was as inevitable as any success can be. Allen, alone of the three, knew that the little improvements in the sale of *Facts*, here and there, were not simply coincidences, or signs of any improvement in the times, but were the direct result of a few tolerant people beginning

actually to like the show which *Facts* was putting on, and to value it.

Knowing that, Allen ceased to worry about the things that Sturges and Mary were still worrying about. He worried harder than ever about his writers but he ceased to worry about *Facts'* success. He knew it was only a matter of time now and he was not even concerned lest the money run out. New angels wouldn't be hard to find if *Facts* proved to be a good show; and soon, he thought, there might even be a line at the box office some night. So he began to look at Mary again and to talk to her about getting married.

The Mary that Allen saw looked even frailer than when he had first met her and almost grim most of the time. He felt very sad for her. Officially betrothed, they had long ago settled down into the relationship that many young married people settle into when the boy's energies are sapped making a living and the girl is trying to run a house on too little money. Allen now perceived how drab they had become and set out to do something about it.

This was not easy because now when they were alone together Mary had a new sense of guilt to add to the old. When they took time off for themselves, she felt they were both being disloyal to *Facts* and she frequently told Allen so. This caused Allen finally to decide to hell with *Facts*, he would take Mary away from *Facts*, by storm, the way he had taken her away from her father's house that first afternoon. This time, however, Mary was dug in deeper. She was actually so involved in *Facts* and its success, and in the girls' seminary she ran in the office, that she did not want to be taken anywhere by storm. It was natural that she should appeal to Sturges for help against Allen's assault.

Mary began by appealing to Sturges when the three of them were together, usually a few blocks up and across Fourth Avenue, in the dim and cavernous Vanderbilt Grill where they used most often to eat dinner together. She appealed to Sturges to persuade Allen that it was insane for them to think of getting married now. Hadn't Sturges said that unless things improved they would soon be bankrupt? It was wrong for them to think of themselves.

"No one's going to go bankrupt," said Allen crossly. "Lay off, will you? All I want is to get you out of here, darling. Morley or Lewis—or even Mahoney—you could make any one

of them into a head girl. They're all right. It isn't the material that bothers the writers now anyway."

"But gosh—" Sturges shook his head and frowned—"there's still a lot of boners in the book that get by somebody. I know it isn't your fault, Mary. But I always get it back from the advertising salesman every time somebody lets a name get misspelled. It's always the name of somebody who might be an account."

"Nuts!" said Allen. "Let's skip the whole business."

But he came back to it later when he was walking Mary uptown to the Grand Central Station so that she could catch a late train back to Greenwich.

So Mary began to appeal to Sturges when Allen wasn't there.

The first time, she waylaid him in the corridor and said, "I've got to see you, Sturges. Will you meet me up the street in the Vanderbilt Lounge?"—which was so very unlike Mary that Sturges called off a meeting with the printer to be there. She spent a half hour telling Sturges what he *had* to get through Allen's head.

When it became clear that Sturges hadn't succeeded, Mary asked him to meet her train from Greenwich and have breakfast with her so that they could talk it over. Breakfast together downstairs in the Grand Central became a routine.

A kind of a surreptitious relationship grew up between them, always for the purpose of discussing how they could make Allen see reason and be happy and content about waiting—and do good work again, for they were both sure that Allen's getting himself into a state over Mary was bad for his editing of *Facts*. It was noticeable that Allen was drinking more.

Sturges' position, for the first few months, remained one of sympathetic understanding. He had no sense of guilt, seeing his partner's fiancée so often and so secretly—it was in Allen's own interest—and, besides, he felt the meetings kept him in closer touch with what was going on in *Facts'* editorial department. Mary was much more communicative about how the editorial machinery worked than her fiancé and, as always, Sturges wanted to know everything. Being in the next room to the writing factory wasn't enough.

Finally Sturges began to find himself irritated, not by Mary but by his partner's continuing the crisis. It wasn't fair to

*Facts*. Far from being placated by the logical arguments Mary fed Sturges to feed her fiancé, Allen was becoming more and more unreasonable.

Sturges had never gone back to his family's home after he got out of college. He had chosen to establish himself in a furnished room on the ground floor of a house on East 35th Street, so that he could get quickly to and from *Facts*' offices. He usually got back to his room around midnight after an after-dinner session at the office, free from the interruptions of visitors. He had a telephone by the studio couch on which he slept, so that if anything went wrong at the printer's they could reach him at any hour.

One night in early June, about two hours after he had gone to sleep, the telephone rang him awake again. But it was not the printer on the other end of the line; it was Mary. It was obvious that she was in a state of great agitation.

She said, "Sturges, I'm in a telephone booth at the St. Regis. Can I come down to see you right away?"

Sturges mumbled, "Sure."

He got into his clothes as fast as he could and put the cover back on the couch over the bedclothes.

When Mary arrived, she was in evening dress and her face was very pale and determined. She sat down on a straight chair by the card table that Sturges used for a desk and said, "Sturges, you're the only one in the world I can turn to and I don't know what to do."

Sturges was now very wide awake.

He said, "Sure. Sure, Mary," and then "Sure" again.

Mary said, "Well, it's Allen of course and I don't know what to do, Sturges."

And then she told him the story of an evening which had centered around dinner at the St. Regis. Allen had insisted that she bring an evening dress to town and get a room at the St. Regis to change into it, because they were going to celebrate. It was the anniversary of their engagement. She had thought it foolish but she had been touched and even a little pleased. He had made a big thing of it, even for Allen. He had found out what room she had engaged and had blarneyed the floor maid into letting him in with armfuls of flowers. When she had gone there from the office she had found it like a florist shop, really. Besides dozens and dozens of cut flowers in vases, he had left her a spray of six purple orchids

to wear. And she hadn't been in her room ten minutes before a waiter knocked. He had been bribed to come up with a bottle of bootleg cocktails—martinis. She had poured it down the sink in case a house detective had seen it being delivered. Then Allen himself had called for her—in tails, imagine—and they had the best table on the St. Regis roof and Allen had ordered the dinner in advance. And she had had fun dancing with him, really.

At dinner they had had a bottle of champagne which Allen had brought with him and then right after dinner, after the waiters had gone, Allen had told her how much he cared for her and wanted her and needed her and he had asked her to marry him again. And of course she had said no, because they had been all over that. She said she had told Allen that anyway she had given her father her word and that she wasn't going to break her word.

And *then* Allen had said, "All right, if you still feel that way about getting married; but tonight's still going to be our wedding night." Then Allen had said he was coming down to her room with her and she had begun to cry because she thought that wasn't fair of Allen, and Allen said it wasn't fair of *her* and she had gotten up and run right out of the night club. And Allen hadn't followed her; he'd just sat there at the table with the orchids lying in front of him because she had forgotten them. And she had been so upset she didn't know what to do so she had taken the elevator downstairs and telephoned to Sturges.

"Is he right, Sturges?" Mary then said and looked very hard at Sturges. "Should I have stayed? Am I being silly?"

Sturges said, "I don't know," but he said it in a way that made Mary feel sure that he thought she was quite right but that he didn't want to be disloyal to his friend. Then Mary began to whimper again and Sturges pulled another chair over next to her and did his best to comfort her. He was completely at a loss as to what to do next. Then, when he was close to Mary and she was in his arms, he knew suddenly what he wanted to do next, which was to make love to her because she had suddenly become very appealing to him. He made no advances, however.

He said, "Mary, this is awful. Something's the matter with Allen. I don't know what it is but something's the matter with him."

Mary now felt very warm and female and desirable. She was clinging to him.

Sturges said, "God damn it, Mary, I don't think you ought to marry him after what's happened. And I think you ought to tell him so."

"I don't think I've really been in love with him for a long time," said Mary suddenly, straightening up.

Then she left and the next day at luncheon she told Allen that she was not going to marry him—ever—and that she had talked it over with Sturges and that Sturges had agreed that she was making the right decision. Allen got up from the table and went back to *Facts'* offices where he found Sturges still signing letters before going to lunch himself. He asked Sturges if it was true that he had been seeing Mary behind his back and talking to her about things that weren't any of his business. Sturges said sure he had been seeing Mary but that Al should keep his shirt on. He said that Mary was a fine girl. She was only trying to do whatever was the right thing to do and God damn it, Allen, we've got a magazine on our hands. Allen then hit him very hard.

It was at this juncture that Mary caught up with her former fiancé. Unfortunately for the gossips, the office was empty at the time. Mary entered Sturges' room just as the latter was getting back to his feet, holding out two protesting and placating arms. He was saying, "Now keep your shirt on, Al. God damn it, keep your shirt on." So she saw Allen hit him a second time when he was still really *on his knees* and that was a *very* unfair thing to do, no matter *how* he felt.

Allen left the office, not even slamming the door, before Mary had time to run across to where Sturges lay from his second fall and to stumble down onto her knees and to try to get him up into her arms. You could not have said whether she was trying to lift him or to embrace him and perhaps she did not know. Anyway, when they did both finally get back to their feet, Mary said to Sturges, "I think that's the nastiest, rottenest thing I ever saw anybody do. You're his best friend."

It was a very emotional time.

Sturges looked past Mary toward the door through which Allen had disappeared. Anger was finally rising in him and he said, "That damn fool. I'll kill him."

Then he put both hands on Mary's shoulders which were

shaking slightly. To Mary he said, "Gee, you're a wonderful girl, Mary. You're worth waiting for."

Sturges said this with great sincerity, for Mary's eyes were shining and she was actually exciting to look at, all young and breathless and a little disheveled. She had also picked him up off the floor—and at a moment when he felt it just possible that he might have been wrong. Her reassurance was sweet.

Sturges did not have long to wait for Mary. They were already inseparable in *Facts*' affairs, and when Allen stayed away from the office for a month after he had hit his partner, Sturges had to rely on her to help him gather together the reins of the editorial department, for *Facts* had to go on. It took Mary exactly two weeks to decide that her decision not to marry had been because she had *never* loved Allen. She told her father and he made no comment. Then she told her father that she thought she had done what she had done—and had not done—because it was Sturges she was probably really in love with. When for the second time her father made no comment, she said, "Daddy, if Sturges asks me, I'm going to marry him. Now. He's a wonderful man. You don't know how hard he has worked."

This time her father said, "Well, it really doesn't matter very much, Mary. You spend so much of your time down there that you might as well be married to *one* of them. I can always get you a divorce, you know."

The market crash and the loss of so much of his fortune had had a broadening effect upon Mr. Van Voort. It was now possible for him to think in terms of change.

Mary had no trouble persuading Sturges to ask the daughter of his largest stockholder to marry him. He did not exactly think of the fact that if prosperity was still around the corner when *Facts*, *The Knowing Weekly*, came to the end of its initial capital, Van Voort was the most likely prospect for a second financing. Sturges had been genuinely fond of Mary for a long time. He respected her character, her determination, her totally unselfish devotion to the interests of his magazine.

They were married simply, in Greenwich, in her father's house.

For the record, what had happened to Allen Bishop was this:

The night of the original row Allen took a plane and flew

to Miami. He had spent the afternoon before he left in the Yale Club, most of it composing a short letter to his father. This letter explained that he had had a row with his partner—it said nothing about Mary—and that he was going down to Key West to see if Ernest Hemingway would take him fishing. He said he wanted to get away to think about a lot of things and he asked his father to make a secret of where he was. He said he was quite all right; he just wanted to get away to think about things and no matter what happened, not to tell anyone where he was because that would spoil everything. If he couldn't find Ernest, he had money enough to hire a boat for himself for a while. He pointed out that he had never asked his father for anything before, but that now he did ask that he trust his son's judgment that what he was doing was best. He said he had been working very hard and that he knew he was too tired to think now, but that after he had been fishing for a little while, he would know what to do.

Ernest Hemingway was an old friend of Allen's father, who had chartered a fishing boat out of Key West every winter for some years. Bishop, Sr., had usually arranged to get his son out of school for at least a week's fishing each year and Allen knew both Key West and his father's friend.

Allen rented a car in Miami and drove himself on from there. Hemingway had been in residence and had taken him out on the *Pillar*. Ernest liked Allen; Allen was a good kid and handy around a boat.

Allen did not know how much he had needed to get away from New York and his magazine, and the days slipped by. It did not take him long to conclude that he had made an ass of himself. He didn't blame either Mary or Sturges; it had all become too involved. After a while he began to miss Mary very much. He blamed *Facts* and their inhuman preoccupation with the magazine for what he felt was the change that had come over her. He still had an almost complete set of illusions about Mary, remembering her as she was that first summer, when she had seemed so young and fresh and responsive. He wanted her terribly. But by now he was ashamed of himself and wanted to be very clear about how he felt about everything before he went back. He was afraid that he might make another mistake if he went back too soon.

With the other half of him, Allen caught Hemingway's enthusiasm for deep sea fishing for its own sake, for the hunt

for little clues (in the wind and the color of the water and the things that floated in it) to where the big fish might lie, for the long cool-hot days in the burning sun with the fresh wind blowing over his bare brown body, for the endless watching of the foaming wake and the two baits skipping either side of it. When he plummaged the first strike from a sailfish and whipped the bait away in his excitement it meant so much to Allen that he put his rod up and went alone up into the bow and cried to himself with shame. And then there were no more strikes for a long time and the last week they put in at sea, they put in because Ernest was by now determined that Allen have the thrill of bringing at least one sailfish aboard before he went back.

When he finally left, Allen knew he was overdue and he drove very fast across the Keys to Miami to be sure to catch his plane. He knew it was going to be very painful to him to apologize both to Mary and to Sturges. He felt it would be a long time before either of them would trust him after the way he had behaved but he felt up to it. He knew what he wanted to do with *Facts* and he would devote himself to it until Mary saw that he could measure up to her standards. By then, the thing would be done and it would no longer be necessary for Mary to work so hard and he could court her again. Meanwhile, at least he would be near her.

The plane from Miami to New York is usually stocked with Miami papers for the passengers to read. One of them, the *Miami Beach Tribune*, printed Walter Winchell's column from the *New York Mirror*. Allen had read no newspapers in Key West. He picked up the *Miami Beach Tribune* and started in to do it from front page to last, to catch up on what had been going on. When he got to the Winchell column, half way down he found an item in it about himself. It read:

... the fact about Allen (*Facts*) Bishop is that he is in Key West, fishing with Ernest Hemingway. His former fiancée, Mary Van Voort, married his (former ?) partner, Sturges Strong, a week ago in Greenwich, Conn. Van Voort, Sr., is the big boss of Amalgamated Chem.

This incidental intelligence caused Allen Bishop, between Savannah, Georgia, and Newark, New Jersey, to alter his plans and to make a whole new set of decisions as to his future.

When he got to New York, Allen called in in advance and

made an appointment with Sturges. Sturges thought it best that they meet some place else but Allen would meet only in *Facts'* office. The interview turned out to be a short one. Allen simply said, "I don't know whether our stock is worth anything, Strong, but mine is for sale. You know where to get hold of father; he has my power of attorney. I'm going fishing again."

Sturges, who had really tried hard to locate Allen during his absence, had a whole string of speeches ready. He had many persuasive arguments to make. At the time, he very much wanted his partner back. He had no conscious sense of wrongdoing; in fact quite the reverse—he felt himself to be the wholly innocent victim of a most mischievous fate. He actually felt abused by Allen. Allen had let him down. It had been a dirty trick to disappear like that and it hurt morale.

Sturges did not, however, get a chance to make any of his speeches, or to put forward any of his arguments, for he had hardly opened his mouth to say, "Now keep your shirt on, Al," when Allen Bishop began laughing. He laughed so loud that Sturges felt embarrassed because the staff would surely hear him through the thin partition and they were already keyed up enough over what was going on.

Allen Bishop was still laughing when he left. His last words were, "You're quite a card, Virgin."

*The Lady of Long House Goes Fishing*

LETIA WAS VERY bored by The Biggest Little City in the World when she got there for her divorce. It only interested her early in the mornings—the way it looked to her when she first drove along North Virginia Street on the way from the plane to report to her local attorneys. At 8 A.M. the bizarre contrasts of the place had intrigued her. Through the open doors she saw the gambling rooms, still open, with young girls in evening dresses standing alongside men in cowboy costumes, with high-heeled boots and sombreros. Some of the girls were sitting behind the gambling contraptions and were croupiers. Their wheels were still turning. The soberer citizens of Reno, in shirt sleeves, looking tanned and healthy, were beginning to pass outside on their way to work.

The sun already shone, its light hard and white, making the tawdriness of the neon signs and the slot machines in the doorways at once silly and indecent. The air was still cool and fresh and swallowed up the thin smoky haze that oozed from the night spots. The big, already bustling office building where her lawyers were, contrasted first with the modest one- or two-story structures that surrounded it and then, as she glanced down a side street, with the desert scenery which began only a few blocks beyond.

This made an impression on Letia and she was also impressed by the casualness with which her new lawyer, George Thatcher, disposed of her problems. She had to wait an hour for him to come to his law offices; he would not be hurried even by a Phelps divorce. When he got there he overrode her objections and brought her back with him to his big rambling house, set on a rare rise of ground, its lush watered lawns and gardens making one last contrast with the harsh landscape that surrounded it. Letia had been met at the plane by a bird-like little female and had been told that she was expected at Judge Thatcher's house for breakfast but she had insisted on being taken to his office first. She did not wish

to relax until whatever legal formalities there were were disposed of.

At Thatcher's place she found that there weren't any formalities—or any that really concerned her. Wood, Wickersham, in New York had given Thatcher and Woodburn in Reno the pertinent facts; all she had to do was to exist for six weeks in Nevada. Thatcher's only concern was to make that existence whatever she chose.

Letia would be most easily waited on in the Riverside Hotel, Reno's skyscraper of seven stories. It stood by the river in which Letia remembered hearing that people threw their old wedding rings after they were divorced.

Or a bungalow could be made available, at one of the fashionable dude ranches where she could sit in the shade of an awning all day, if she liked, and listen to the gossip—or go forth and make gossip for the other women. Many of them would have brought their own gossip, having been accompanied to Reno by the men they intended to marry and with whom they were surprised to find they were expected to live openly.

Or, if she liked, Thatcher would have an establishment set up to care for her in one of the big or little places that could be rented "for the season" on the Nevada side of Lake Tahoe. Lake Tahoe was hardly more than an hour's drive over the mountains from Reno itself.

Letia chose the place of her own on the Lake. It turned out to be a huge rambling two-story structure which smelled of the sun on its shingles and the carpet of pine needles that was its lawn. It had big picture windows which looked out on the Lake and the Lake was rimmed with picture-postcard mountains. The house was furnished with ugly things that still had an easy charm because they were unpretentious and comfortable.

Letia had brought a timid maid, named Susan, with her. Susan was afraid of everything, of the loneliness of the site, high on a promontory, several city blocks from its nearest neighbor, of the animals that she imagined stalked past her window at night, and of the taciturn local servants. These moved in with Susan, in slacks and shirtwaists and blue dungarees, and they spoke to Mrs. Phelps in flat, matter-of-fact tones as if she were no better than one of themselves and not their mistress. Old Woodbury, who looked after the grounds

and whose wife was the cook, even went over Mrs. Phelps with his eyes as if she were a prize animal and he was making his own appraisal of her points.

Letia had not realized how much she was going to miss the stimulation of the game she'd been playing for a year, bringing her husband and Rosalie together. And although she was essentially a hardy plant, and transplanted easily, her new surroundings were almost as much of a shock to her as to Susan. She was unimpressed by the charm of the place. She thought it almost unbearably crude and agreed with Susan that the other servants were disrespectful.

Worst of all was the idleness. All her life with Phelps, Letia had felt that one of the things that his money should have bought but didn't was leisure. As Orlando Hicks had once predicted, being Mrs. Phelps was a full-time executive position, every hour bringing her conflicting demands between which she had to choose. It was, in fact, to get relief from the demands which being Mrs. Phelps made on her that she felt she was now in residence in Nevada. But the logic of it did not make up for the fact that she had no outlet for her energy, mental or physical, and this energy was as formidable as ever. Letia's longed-for idleness soon became a kind of suffering to her.

Actually there were plenty of people for Letia to see. Thatcher himself brought the vanguard to call and she tried going to the cocktail parties they gave, gambling with them at night either in one of the places in Reno or at Cal-Neva. Cal-Neva was a big showplace that straddled the California-Nevada border less than half a mile from her house. But everyone she met was either too casual or too enthusiastic. There was no purpose for Letia in letting them cultivate her acquaintance. It was not part of her job now to be with people and to make conversation. They had really nothing better to talk about than how they felt about each other and the people they were divorcing. Letia found it all very pointless. For the first time in her life she had thoughtfulness thrust upon her. Thinking her own thoughts was now the least boring thing she had to do and she thought simply to relieve her *ennui*, not purposefully to solve her problems.

Lying on the porch in the sun, high over the sparkling Lake, Letia began thinking again of Joe. She recalled how wonderfully she had felt when she had first been in love

with him. She went back in her feelings into a world which she had abandoned and soon she began to feel very homesick for it. She felt old for the first time and wondered if she had been as wise as she thought she had been. She was not quite twenty-five.

She remembered Joe very clearly. She remembered all the little details of their life together and at night after she had been thinking of him, she began dreaming of him. One night she dreamt that she had come to Joe's tiny flat in the evening, feeling breathless and excited, to tell him that she had bought the most wonderful magazine for him, that it was his and he was to be the editor. And then they were in a wonderful big office, very beautifully and lavishly decorated and Joe was sitting cross-legged on his desk in his B.V.D.'s shouting orders. And there was a great coming and going of people. She was in a corner of the office and there were always so many people coming and going between her and Joe that she could never seem to get across the room to him. And she could not catch his eye and she was very frightened because she was on her knees and there was a terrifying man standing over her, shaking a pail at her, a pail with shiny handles and she knew that there was death in the pail and that she had to take it and that only Joe could save her. But now Joe was lying in the center of the room on the thick carpet and all the others were grouped around him and saying "shh" and holding their fingers to their lips and looking angrily at her. She had killed him with the pail with the shiny handles.

When she woke, she was wet with a cold sweat and she was very frightened.

After she had had that dream and several others which were not frightening but which always had Joe in them, she made a conscious decision to take one of the men whom she had met . . . any one of them; it did not matter which. It was one of the rare decisions she never carried out. Most of the men who kept calling her up or coming to see her had been sent away by Susan. She had no difficulty beckoning them back. But each time she singled one out and invited him to see her home at night, she found she behaved very strangely when she got him there. Sometimes she wanted him while she was dancing with him but as soon as she was alone with him, the desire left her. She would become unreasonably angry with

him and drive him away. Once she had to call Susan to help her get rid of a boy who wouldn't go.

Then Letia had a spell of thinking she was going mad and she was frightened most of the time and went to many picnics and parties just to have people around her. It seemed to her as if she had lived in the mountains above Lake Tahoe for many years, even though it had been only a little over a month. During the last two weeks, she fastened on a plan to abandon the whole business. She would get into her car and drive alone through the night until she reached New York. Then she would find Joe and tell him that everything bad that had happened between them, and everything that had happened to her since, was unimportant and that all she wanted was to be with him. And after she had lived with him, Randolph Phelps could divorce her in New York. That part didn't matter—she did not want Randolph's name or his money or anything from him.

This dream project reassured her, and during the last days she spent in Nevada she lived by putting it together in different forms, sometimes traveling to Joe by plane, sometimes by train. But on the morning that Thatcher had said she should come to Reno, bringing the Woodburys to testify that she had been a bona fide resident of Nevada for forty-two days, the mirage disappeared and it was as if she had never seen it.

Letia woke that day still in the big double bed in the master's bedroom of the house she had rented, and knew that she was there to carry out a plan she had made a long time ago. She let Susan pick out the clothes she would wear for the occasion, smiling tolerantly both at Susan's concern for what would be appropriate and at her voluble relief that their life in this terrible place was about to be over. The form of the thing, Letia felt, was inconsequential. The reality was that a few hours hence, with the scratching of the right pens, she would be the mistress of a fortune of her own contriving.

Neither at that moment, nor at any moment afterwards, did it occur to Letia that the huge sum which Phelps had settled on her before she had agreed to leave for Reno was not wholly and legitimately hers. She had spent four years of her life earning it. It deprived Phelps of nothing. She continued to have the friendliest of feelings toward him. He

could have made half a dozen of such settlements without changing his scale of living.

Letia drove herself through the mountain passes and down into the valley and on to the court house in Reno, with Susan at her side and the chauffeur with the Woodburys in the back seat. She was very pleased that there were so many photographers waiting there on the court house steps for her and she posed for them and made jokes with them. They thought she was as unspoiled as any rich young woman they had met, and they were authorities. They agreed that as a looker she could easily hold her own with the girls who made their living by their looks in Hollywood. She wore a simple dress of white sharkskin and her light blonde hair had been bleached by the sun until it was almost as white as the dress itself. She was one of those rare blondes who tan well. She looked like an idealized picture of an outdoor girl.

The camera men photographed her getting out of the car, going into the court house, coming out and throwing her ring into the Truckee River. She refused, however, to kiss the court house pillar. She did not think it would make a good picture.

After her divorce, the better of her acquaintances had thought it appropriate to give a farewell dinner in her honor at Cal-Neva. The dining room at Cal-Neva is on the California side of the state line, the gambling casino on the Nevada side. The dance floor was built around a natural rock formation that had been left intact. Part of this rock provided the room with a fireplace; another part offered shelter for a fountain, the water from which trickled over the moss-covered rocks into a pool by the edge of the dance floor itself.

After the dinner, which was for twelve in the big dining room, everyone crossed over to the Nevada side and played at gambling, from time to time returning as far as the bar for whatever pleased them.

When Letia had arrived in Nevada she had not known how much her stay there would cost so she had drawn a check in Thatcher's office before his arrival and given it to the bird-like secretary to open an account for her in the local bank. This check had been for \$50,000, Letia being at the moment in no mood to fret over a dollar more or less. But even paying Thatcher's \$10,000 fee herself—she would collect it back from

the Phelps' estate—she did not begin to dispose of all the cash she had now transferred to Reno. She spent less than \$6,000 on herself, even living the most luxurious life that was available to a transient. She had done no entertaining herself and her occasional gambling had been with the least expensive chips they sold.

That morning after the quick business in the court house and the standing about for photographs, Letia had paid her second and last visit to Thatcher's office to give him his check. On the spur of a moment of exhilaration, she had written another check for the balance she had on deposit in Reno and asked Thatcher to get her the money in cash. She had spent many hundreds of thousands of dollars in the last four years but she had never before had a large sum in cash in her hands.

Thatcher had first telephoned and then, on their way out, he had stopped with her at the bank downstairs. The bank teller had put thirty-four new one-thousand-dollar bills in an envelope and handed it through the cage to Letia, along with the assortment of small bills and silver dollars that made up the remainder. Then the president of the bank himself had come from his desk and been introduced to her by Judge Thatcher and hoped she had had a pleasant stay and for the rest of the day Letia had forgotten that she had so much money in her pocketbook.

Now, after the farewell dinner given her at Cal-Neva, when she went into the gaming room and opened her purse, Letia felt the heavy envelope. Again she experienced a sudden sense of irresponsible exultation. She took several of the thousand-dollar bills from the envelope and laid them in front of the croupier at one of the roulette tables.

"In five-hundred-dollar chips," she said.

"I am sorry, Madam," said the croupier shaking his head, "there is a hundred-dollar limit on this table."

Letia was irritated and started to turn away.

A man who must have been a manager appeared from nowhere. He said, "Madam, if you like, I will show you to a table where a thousand-dollar limit can be arranged."

Several people followed Letia and the manager to a table where they made her comfortable with a high stool with a thick cushion of upholstery on it. There were only one or two other players at this table. Letia had no instinct for gambling and was merely piqued that her first impulse had

been checked. It took her only an hour to lose the \$34,000. Even though she had once won eight even-money bets in a row for a thousand dollars each, she had never been ahead. Toward the end of her money, she became unreasonably frightened. The croupier's voice was hard and impersonal, the men and women around the table who were strangers to her watched her intensely and whispered among themselves each time she reached into her purse and brought more of the shiny flat new bills out of the envelope in it.

Letia had never felt foolish before, but when the money was all gone and she searched through her purse and there was no more, several people tittered and she felt really foolish and humiliated and knew she was flushing under her tan and biting her lip. In the mirror she caught a glimpse of her face and saw that she had let her hair become disarranged and that one strand of it was loose and hanging dissolutely down next to one eye. Two of the men who had been at her farewell dinner had come to the table with her and one of them was saying things like "Oh, well, easy come, easy go, Mrs. Phelps," and she wanted to run away from them. She knew she sounded forced and that the bitterness showed through when she cut him short with "Not easy for me, thank you," and then "Let's go get a drink."

The sense of humiliation persisted when she realized she would have to find Thatcher and ask him to cash another check for her to pay for the trip home.

She knew the whole thing was silly. What was an envelope of thousand-dollar bills to her now? But the whole episode had been out of character. She had never made a fool of herself before and for months, whenever the thought of that evening came back to her, she was furious. But even so she was unaware of what a profound effect her brief career as a gambler was to have on her. What it did was to remind her unconscious guardian that she was not as secure as she thought she was. What the dramatic little loss which was really so inconsequential did was to start her thinking that no one is secure financially who cannot replace by his own efforts the sums which life may take away from him.

Presently Letia was to formulate this fragment of a thought into an actual pattern for living. Within three months after her return to New York, a rich woman in her own right, she had decided to build a new life around finding out how money

was made in this good capitalistic world. She decided, living in a thirty-dollar-a-day suite in the Plaza, that she would begin at the bottom to find out how rich people got rich in the first place.

Orlando Hicks was the only one of Letia's old friends who met her at the Newark Airport. His school for the theater was not prospering and he looked seedy but Letia was really glad to see him. She had written him and he had engaged a suite at the Plaza for her and seen that it had flowers in it. He had also, because he had made his own collection and he knew it would interest her, had the press clippings on her divorce pasted in a scrapbook for her to read. He had got in touch with Towers, by telephone to Bar Harbor, and arranged for two trunks full of Letia's possessions to be moved from the storage rooms to which she had consigned them. Orlando himself, with two of the floor maids at the Plaza, had unpacked and distributed the contents as well as he knew how to make the rooms home-like. It was a corner suite on the eighth floor, looking one way down on the Plaza itself and the other across Central Park.

Orlando had also called up a couple of the papers so that there were camera men there waiting to take shots of her when she arrived. Letia was as excited by everything as if she were a girl again and Susan was in seventh heaven to be back in civilized parts.

The first day Letia spent shopping. A few days later she took a taxi and rode down to the offices of Wood, Wickersham, Root, Sullivan and Taft to ask the lawyer who had been assigned by Mr. Wood to her divorce his advice on the management of her finances. His name was Falkenstall and Letia was so favorably impressed with him now that she asked if he could not take over the management of her money personally. Falkenstall said it wasn't his line of work but presently he agreed and they went over the figures.

Phelps' settlement had been in negotiable securities which were now in Wood, Wickersham's custody, the transfer having been arranged in their client's absence. Falkenstall did some scribbling with a pencil and told Letia that she should be able to count on \$68,870 that year after taxes. Letia was content for the time being.

Most of the men and a few of the women whom she had

known when she was Randy's wife turned up, one by one, writing her or calling from the country to ask her for a week end, but Letia preferred to spend her time with Orlando and his undemanding Broadway friends. Her first idea was that she would return to Broadway, this time as an angel, financing plays Orlando might find for her. Gossip on the size of the settlement Randy had made had been printed by the reliable Leonard Lyons in his column in the *Evening Post*, and as soon as Orlando was seen again with her, he became very popular with aspiring playwrights and producers. It was suspected that he might be the way to that share of the Phelps' estate which Letia now controlled. It was Orlando himself who shooed them away and warned Letia against them, although he could have made a very good thing of it for himself.

"It's not your racket, baby," he told her. "You haven't any feel for show business. I know you've got a lot of jack now but they could take you for all of it."

Letia probably got the idea for a shop of her own from the amount of time she spent the first month after her return buying things. In the first place, she bought more clothes that fall than she had ever bought before, even just after she had married Phelps. Somehow clothes seemed to mean more to her now. In the second place, for the first time in her life she found herself horrified by prices one would have thought she had long since become accustomed to paying. It made a definite difference to her that the money she was spending was strictly her own. As Phelps' wife, it had probably cost \$25,000 a year to clothe her. Her inexpensive evening dresses were \$200 apiece. She was impatient with shopping and she always bought many times more of everything than she needed, thinking that it would save her another excursion. But now the rate of \$25,000 a year was more than a third of her income. She did not buy less but she resented more the prices the stores charged her, and she also found she was increasingly critical of what was for sale and noticed that she kept having ideas of her own on how to improve things like dresses and hats.

One of the women whom she sometimes had make her an expensive hat was Sally Victor. Sally was a small, dark-haired girl whom Letia had heard Joe talk about when *The New Yorker* discovered Sally in its early days. Now, in 1931,

Sally had a shop of her own and charged Letia \$100 for a design Letia was sure she sold to other women for a fifth of that. When Letia reproached her, Sally said, "Sure, why shouldn't I?"

Letia thought that over and agreed that there was no good reason—as long as she herself wanted the hat enough and had the money to pay for it. She liked Sally Victor, who was direct and unsubtle and who appreciated Letia's looks without being unctious or catty. This was flattering because Victor made things for many other beautiful women and could on occasion be exceedingly nasty about any one of them. But Sally had the same respect for the hard quality in Letia that Towers had and never attacked her.

When Letia said to Sally, "I should go in business for myself," Mrs. Victor replied, "I should cut my own throat and tell you so, but of course you should. *I* had a darned hard time starting this place and if your fancy friends don't pay their bills—which a lot of them don't—*I* can't afford to sue them. But you have money enough to do anything you like. Of course," Sally added thoughtfully, "making hats wouldn't be enough for you. *You* should make clothes. Whole costumes."

Mrs. Victor took Letia around to the sewing room of a couturiere whom she liked and showed her the row of dummies of all her friends' figures. They laughed about how each year most of the replicas had to have extra padding sewn on them as the originals took on weight. Mrs. Victor found out for her how much the girls in the sewing room got, what was paid for materials and many little tricks of the trade, all because Letia was so responsive.

After Letia decided to start a shop of her own, Mrs. Victor remained her friend and even sent her good smart sales girls for whom she had no jobs herself. Letia debated calling her shop Phelps House but Falkenstall told her that wouldn't do. Cheap, he said. She settled on Long House, for her maiden name, and cabled Lucien Lelong asking him to come to her opening.

The interesting thing about the business that Letia Long Phelps started was that it completely ignored the very fact of life which Victor had felt would be its most important asset. It ignored, as a business, the fact that Letia could have put a small fortune behind it. From the very first discussion she

had had with a real estate agent about a site, Letia operated her business as if it had its own way to make.

It is quite true that if Letia had not been a rich woman, and if her wealth had not been publicized for many years, she could never have driven the bargains she did. But the fact remains (and Falkenstall could testify to it because he drew up the papers of the corporation) that the capital that Letia Phelps invested in Long House was exactly \$5,000, and that she made that last until she collected the first bills from her customers and was on the road to solvency. Deposits, on space or materials, she simply refused to make; she demanded and got twice the amount and length of credit from manufacturers that many a long-established house was able to manage. The sewing room she had to pay in cash but her first salesgirl was her old friend, Lucy Hartrampf, who would have been glad to pay her for the privilege of being kept occupied and told what to do.

Starting at the bottom of the depression helped rather than hurt; if it cut down the inventory of eligible customers, it multiplied the number of manufacturers and suppliers whose distress could be taken advantage of. A dollar went a long way in those days.

The decorator who did the Long House salon on Madison Avenue worked mainly for the publicity which he trusted Letia to bring him. His faith was richly rewarded for Letia's opening escaped the confines of the fashion page and broke as a news story. Orlando Hicks was now her self-appointed press agent. It was a first-class story and a running one, because Orlando saw to it that the awning in front of Letia's shop got on the beat of the society photographers.

All this would have been a fine show but Letia would have left her creditors holding the bag if it had not been for the fact that, when she got down to it with a sketchbook and a model (and some expert advice from the head fitter she had talked into coming with her from Bergdorf's), she really had a flair for making conventional lines seem new and exciting. Her old knack with a pencil came back to her. Essentially she was more imitative than creative, but her imitations always had a twist to them. She never produced anything that was strange and new and wonderful, but everything she touched had an appealing kind of glitter to it. She stalked along the edge but never quite fell over it into bad taste or absurdity.

Moreover, the whole fabric of penny-pinching and publicity and creative copying was, from the very beginning, held together as an enterprise by her extraordinary physical and mental energy. Overnight Letia's life became the antithesis of the long heart-breaking days of idleness at Lake Tahoe, and even outdid the old sixteen-hour days of making news for the society columns. At six in the morning she was up making her own coffee before the Plaza kitchen opened. Then she could have a little time with no interruptions, to fuss and draw and putter in the extra room in the suite from which she had had the bed removed and tables set up, littered with the tools of her trade as a designer. By nine she would come into her sewing room with a dozen ideas worked out for what to do with this or that model that was in the works. All day long she would manage, and wait herself on the women she thought most important to Long House. In the evening, just as she had worked at being Mrs. Phelps, she worked at being the proprietress of Long House, going where her competitors' clothes would be worn, seeing the people she wanted to have remember her, feeling the pace of life in New York.

By the first spring after her opening in September of 1932, Letia had decided to go into wholesaling. By the summer when she began putting the first trade models through the loft she had set up in the building next to Long House, she knew all the people who were important to her in her new enterprise—the buyers from Marshall Field's and Neiman-Marcus and I. Magnin and the other great stores of the West and South. The Long Line would be introduced in every good department store from coast to coast that fall. By Christmas, she knew that the first full calendar year of her wholesale operation would net her enough money to pay off most of what had been invested (by her creditors) in Long House. In a few years, barring misfortune, it might even make her more money than she got from the securities Randolph Phelps had turned over to her. She had done it. In a little over a year—and a year of economic depression at that—she had proved to her satisfaction that she was dependent on nothing but her own will.

The only trouble was that her business was soon to own her as thoroughly as the Phelps family had owned her. Long House owned Letia Long Phelps so thoroughly, in fact, that

she had no time to realize that she belonged to it as completely as it belonged to her.

After the original creditors were repaid, there was working capital to be accumulated. The continued success of the wholesale line was dependent on Letia's keeping her exclusive clientele in New York intact, and her continuously capitalizing on that fact in print. She had two collections a year to create in addition to her labors as an executive.

Perhaps it had been to keep herself occupied, or to prove a point, or because money itself was more important to her than it should have been, but the effect of it all was that she seemed, those years when Long House was being built, to be punishing herself. She was dressing other women in beautiful things and wearing psychological sackcloth herself. She had no life of her own outside of her business.

Even Orlando, whose approval had been unqualified during the first years, was appalled. He was now full-time in Letia's life, having at her insistence closed his school and come to work for her as a kind of combination public relations executive and overseer. He was so appalled, in fact, that he conspired to get Mrs. Phelps away from it all. The people who were closest to Letia took matters in their own hands. Late in the summer of 1936 Orlando flew to Florida and contracted for the place on Upper Matecumbe Key for the month of September and chartered the *Miramar* with its former owner and skipper, Solomon Janeway, to see that Letia spent her days relaxing on the sea.

Then when everything was ready, Orlando and Susan and Sally Marchant, the head fitter at Long House, got together again and the three of them took Letia by storm. They worked for her and they were her loyal servants but just because of that she must obey them. She would take these reservations on tomorrow's plane and go to the Keys and spend a month there, or two or three months, until she was a human being again.

Letia was very tired. She surprised and embarrassed them all by starting to cry, and Orlando and Sally saw Susan off with her. She had called Falkenstall at the last moment to say good-bye and he had sent a boy to the plane with two orchids in a transparent cellophane box. Falkenstall was always attentive to his good clients.



The next orchids Falkenstall was to send Letia would be to the hospital in Miami where she would be fighting for her life after drifting forty-nine hours in a life belt in the Atlantic Ocean. That would be several days after the papers had reported that she had been drowned when the hurricane had blown her and the fishing camp she had rented on Upper Matecumbe Key together into the sea. The newspaper stories which thus pardonably exaggerated what actually happened made no mention of the death of Solomon Janeway.

While it was Orlando's initiative that brought up the subject of a vacation for Letia, it was Letia herself who really picked both the time and the place, inspired by having read a story of The Great Hurricane of 1935. She found it in an old issue of a magazine which she chanced on at her hairdresser's and conveyed the interest it evoked in the Florida Keys to Orlando at dinner that evening. She said that there was one place in the world she wanted to visit some day and that that was Matecumbe, where the big Hurricane had struck the year before and blown away such impressive sections of it that the railway from Miami to Key West was not to be rebuilt. She said she'd like to go there during the hurricane season, which she understood to be in September so that she could *feel* how it was there when the big wind came to drown and batter to death so many hundreds of people. She said that wind had always excited her and she wanted to try to imagine what a wind strong enough actually to suffocate people was like. Orlando had remarked that he'd been in Miami once during a hurricane on the Keys and hadn't noticed anything unusual himself.

"You were in some cellar, as usual," Letia laughed. "Whatever your hurricane was, the Matecumbe one was much worse. It killed the most people of any. They say you can still see the rails it twisted. Someday I'll go there."

There is no question but that that conversation was the one that started Orlando. When he felt the time had come when Letia *had* to be sent somewhere to stop her from killing herself with work, he remembered the only wish to see something new she'd ever expressed. The timing was right because the fall line had been finished by Labor Day. Orlando had engaged the boat simply because he was sure she'd tire of looking at the ruins left by a disaster that had happened the year before. The house on Upper Matecumbe, his correspond-

ent in Miami assured him, had just been rebuilt on the very site of the 1935 disaster.

So if what prompted Letia's interest was an unconscious desire to attempt suicide by suffocation, her management was excellent.

It began unpromisingly enough. The fishing camp on Upper Matecumbe had even less to recommend it to Susan than the place at Crystal Bay on Lake Tahoe, although the service was better because the cook and the house man had been recruited from a hotel in Miami which was open all year round. But Solomon Janeway, who was the best servant of all of them, always frightened Susan and began by irritating her mistress. He frightened Susan because she knew he was a gentleman and had once owned the 38-foot boat which he now operated on charter for the company which had bought it when the Janeways went bankrupt. It gave her an eerie, uncomfortable feeling for him to be always so polite and obsequious even to her, and him such a fine figure of a man, well over six feet tall and not old either.

Solomon Janeway was all lean muscle, with his still smooth skin burned brown and hard. He had very clear light blue eyes, although it wasn't often you could catch them. He very rarely looked anyone in the eye but you felt that this was not because he was timid but because the only pride he took was in disciplining himself to be the perfect servant. He was so thoughtful and quick and efficient and he did everything that a servant should do so perfectly, including never being there when his presence might be embarrassing, that it made even Susan, who was the very soul of submissive competence herself, seem forward and clumsy.

Solomon, Susan guessed, was in his early forties and all she knew about him was that the Janeways were a Savannah family and that something bad had happened about the bankruptcy but that that had been years ago. Solomon had made his living since then taking care of the *Miramar*, which had been the smaller of the Janeways' two fishing boats, working for the rich people who chartered her.

Solomon, of course, was not called upon to perform any duties ashore. If he had been an ordinary boatman he would have had a helper and they would have lived on his boat. Solomon, however, not only sailed alone but seemed also

to feel called upon to see that everything was as shipshape ashore as it was on his little craft. He had brought the cook and the houseman down with him from Miami a few days before Letia had arrived and he had sweated them himself until every window in the bungalow lodge shone and the floors glistened with new waxing and there were flowers in vases in every room. It was known that this was the kind of thing that Solomon did and the best real estate people in Miami always tried to get him for their richest and most particular clients. The more impossible the guests, the more satisfaction Solomon seemed to get out of serving them.

Susan had her own reasons for being uncomfortable with Solomon's eerie perfection. Letia was irritated with him because she could not break through to find out what kind of a man he really was. She was almost immediately impatient with a subservience she diagnosed as romantic nonsense, and the second of the long days they spent together on the Gulf Stream she told him so. Susan had, of course, given her all the background a few hours after they had arrived to settle themselves, and Letia had begun to throw all her energies into relaxing herself. She had decided that learning to fish would be her outlet. She had known a few deep sea fishermen well enough in the world she had left to sense that one could lose oneself in the occupation. So Susan had hardly begun unpacking her bags before Letia had sent for Solomon and told him that she would want to go out on the water every day and all day and that his job was to teach her everything he knew about catching fish and not to be satisfied with anything less than perfect performance on her part.

Solomon had said, "Certainly, Madam," and Letia's annoyance may have begun then with the way he said it, which was respectful but paid no respect at all to the fact that this was his first meeting with a woman who was used to feeling more positive reactions in handsome men whom she met for the first time. Then on the next day, in the intimacy of the little boat at sea, Solomon seemed wholly oblivious of the fact that he was temporarily the most important man in the life of one of America's most beautiful women.

It had been some time now since Letia had practiced at being one of America's most beautiful women, but even though she had been concentrating on making herself into America's most practical female executive and business woman

she had continued to take for granted that she was so attractive that her passing any man by was a matter of her decision, not his. She had a right to make this assumption because she had yet to meet a man who could remain genuinely unconscious of her presence as a woman. Yet Solomon seemed to be.

When she attacked him directly, laying down her rod and turning in the swivel chair toward where he was standing at the helm of the boat a few feet further forward, his first answer was, "Excuse me, Mrs. Phelps. You shouldn't lay a rod down like that. If a fish strikes now he'll take the tackle."

Letia reached for the rod and reel on her knees, lifted it, and with a very deliberate gesture dropped the \$90 rod with its \$400 Vom Hofe reel over the side of the boat.

"Solomon," she said, "you're just a plain, common garden stinker."

"I'm sorry," said Solomon with just a flicker of a glance forward, appraising the slant of the choppy seas the *Miramar* was quartering and making a small, almost unconscious adjustment of the wheel in his hands. "What would you like me to do now, Mrs. Phelps?"

"I'd like you to be human," said Letia. "And stop calling me Mrs. Phelps."

Solomon made another small adjustment in the *Miramar's* course and said, "If that's the way you'd like it—Letia. I thought you wanted to learn how to fish."

Letia got up from the swivel chair, bracing herself to the motion of the boat and managed herself to the ladder which led down to the first of the two little cabins in the *Miramar*, the one in which Solomon had set the table for her lunch. She was presently to be served as if he were a steward at the best table in the *Queen Elizabeth's* dining salon. To make it calm, and because he was the only crew the boat had, he would run the *Miramar* into the lee of some sand spit and drop the anchor before reappearing in a starched white mess jacket.

The place from where Solomon steered the boat, while they were fishing, was on the port side of the ladderway. There, with his back to the gunwale, he could divide his attention between cradling the little craft through the four- or five-foot waves that ran in the Gulf and his passenger, sitting in the single fishing chair in the stern, her bare feet on the fantail coaming, bracing herself, the rod usually with its butt in the

socket of the fishing chair, its tip held up with one hand on the rod just above the reel.

The difficulty Letia had in maneuvering the few steps from the fishing chair to the ladderway, with the 38-foot boat pitching as well as rolling, should have convinced her that she was operating on his territory, not hers. When motion was called for, Solomon seemed to move about the boat as effortlessly as if its decks were imbedded in concrete. When she reached his side, Solomon said to her, simply and in a matter-of-fact tone, "You're the boss, you know. I'll run this boat any way you like—Letia."

Letia was now furious. She was conscious of the fact that she had to hold on with both hands, with her feet planted at an awkward angle which she did not dare to alter. So, clinging to the sliding roof over the companionway, half doubled over, her rear end swung back and forth to the motion of the boat, like a pendulum. She also knew that her hair had come out of the bandanna in which she had tied it and that it was stringy in the salt air. Moreover, she was aware that when she was angry, her face hardened and, unless the situation was right so that she was the master and it frightened people, that hardness had no charm. But she was embarked on a course from which there was no retreat.

"All right, Solomon Janeway," she said. "If that's the way you want it, you can have it. I *am* the boss and you work for me. Do you understand that? And I want you to stop being a stinker and be nice to me. I want you to talk to me—about something else than how to hold that damn rod. I want it to be fun out here."

Solomon seemed to think this over for a moment and then he said, "Look, I think we'll have more fun if we fish in where it's quieter."

Then, as if he had given the matter further consideration and decided on some line of conduct in more detail, he said, "We will be an hour getting in. You're a good sailor, Letia, but you haven't got your sea legs yet. Why don't you go down and get in something dry and we'll be in to where you can walk around by the time you're ready. Would you like to have lunch up here on deck with me?"

He seemed to be adjusting himself to Letia's command to be pleasant as effortlessly as he adjusted the course of the *Miramar* to the chop of the seas.

When Letia got below, and he had carefully closed the hatchway doors behind her, she was still so angry with him that there were tears in her eyes. She saw that he was right about her having to change her clothes; her cashmere sweater was drenched from the spray of the quartering course and one leg of her slacks was dripping wet too. She remembered that it was Solomon who had foreseen the possibility and told Susan to pack other clothes for her in a suitcase. He had not gone quite as far as to lay out her clothes but the suitcase was there on the foot of one of two bunks and alongside it was a carefully folded bath towel with two face towels neatly centered on top of it. She picked up the evidence of his thoughtfulness and threw it on the deck.

It had occurred to Letia that deep sea fishing might become an obsession to her while she was alone at sea on her vacation. She had not foreseen that an equally irrational obsession with making Solomon Janeway into a human being and a man was what was going to absorb her. There are men and even women who spend their last cent and risk their jobs, when the fever has them, to stay at sea just one more week to catch their first sailfish. Isolated from the world in a fishing boat on the Gulf Stream, it gets to be so that nothing else in the world is so important. That was the way the conquest of Solomon got to be with Letia.

Some fishermen have luck in the end and, on the last day they have to spend at sea, a strike comes and they don't plummer it and nothing happens to the line while they are playing the sailfish and presently it belongs to them and can be mounted as a trophy and taken home. Luck never came to Letia. Whatever it was that had happened to Solomon had happened too long ago and hurt too much and he had his own reasons for living which were more important to him than Letia's were to her. Or maybe she really didn't interest him, although that is hard to believe.

For four long weeks they spent their days together alone at sea and separated only when night fell and they made their way back to the dock at Matecumbe and Letia slept restlessly alone until the dawn came and she would go back to the dock where Solomon would be waiting with the *Miramar* already ready, topped off with fuel and water, and provisioned, swept and scrubbed, its lines coiled, its brass polished, and its motor idling, already warm. Letia wondered if he ever slept, for it

must have taken him several hours at least to do all the things to the boat he did between the time they parted in the dark and the time the sun rose and they were ready to go out again.

The only thing that Letia could never quite bring herself to order him to do was to leave his boat in the evenings and come back with her to the fishing lodge, where Susan and the other servants waited. But while she was getting ready for bed she could hear him in the kitchen across the bungalow's courtyard telling the cook what he needed ready for the boat in the morning, telephoning the station at Key West for the next day's weather. Solomon never lapsed once from the perfection of his management.

Neither did he lapse in the perfection of his obedience to her command that he be friendly. He had other rods than the one she had thrown away and he taught her, finally, how to fish. After days in the calmer waters over the reefs, where she practiced catching barracuda and kingfish, or over the holes into which they dropped their lines to bring up the big amberjack, he took her back onto the Gulf and three times he put her over sailfish, gentled her into letting them play with the bait for what seemed to her hours before she struck, gave her just enough but not too much coaching, so that she brought them safely in. One was a big one, eight feet long.

Solomon had an old phonograph aboard and his own collection of records which he said brought the fish up and made them want to bite. He said the bluest pieces had the best effect, "Fats" Waller's brass the best of all. He always had beer and whisky and plenty of ice aboard and Letia made him add champagne for which he had to telephone to Miami. They drank a great deal in the course of each day and often when they came ashore they were both very high. When they did not get in until it was dark, Solomon would bring the *Miramar* alongside almost at full throttle till the last moment when he would throw the propeller in reverse and open the throttle wide again and there would be a great churning as the craft slowed and it would slide to a stop, touching the pier as lightly as a feather dropping on a pillow. And each time, just as he came in, he would laugh and say, "Here's where we shoot the ten grand." The *Miramar* had cost a good deal more than \$10,000 when it was new.

Solomon's only free concession to intimacy had been to nickname her Cleopatra. That started the first time they fin-

ished two quarts of champagne between them at lunch, anchored in a quiet shallow place, and she had stretched out next to him in the sun on the deck above the cabin and said, "Darling, kiss me." He laughed before he kissed her and said, "Okay, Cleopatra," and after that he always called her Cleopatra.

Not long after Solomon began calling her Cleopatra, Letia tried asking him to be even more intimate. He had fallen into the habit of kissing her good night in the cockpit of the *Miramar*, after he had made the craft fast, before he gathered her things together and helped her ashore. Sometimes at sea he kissed her too, but at sea always playfully.

It had been a long time since Letia had known a man, and the sun and the wind and the long lazy days were making her feel like a woman again. Yet Solomon seemed wholly unaware of it. At night, Letia bit her lip thinking about it; by days she wore less and less clothing until, in a tiny bra and a thing around her hips that she had cut to mimic a diaper, she was very nearly naked. And she knew—she could feel it pulsing through her—that she was very desirable and ripe. Physically, she was an absolutely perfect specimen of adult young female: nowhere either too fat or too thin, and now a glowing bronze in color. Solomon must be beaten again to break down whatever it was in him that refused to acknowledge her femaleness.

So on another perfect afternoon, anchored in the clean blue water over a shoal, in the lee of a little cluster of rocks, Letia set about beating him again. He had spread a wide kapok beach mat on the forward deck which was just long enough for them to stretch out on. Letia was lying flat; Solomon was sitting cross-legged, facing her, drinking the last of the champagne which became warm so quickly in a tin mug. They had thrown the bottle overboard and it was still floating a few yards away, its silver paper twinkling.

Letia stretched lazily. The wine had not intoxicated her but it had made her relaxed and uninhibited.

She said dreamily, "Do you really think of me as Cleopatra, Solomon? Or are you making fun of me when you call me that?"

"You're Cleopatra herself," said Solomon. "No one could mistake it."

"Cleopatra was a queen," said Letia. "Queens can command anyone to do anything."

"I know," said Solomon, "I work for one," and he put his cup down on the deck.

"Do you really, darling?" Letia stretched out her arms and twisted them, catching the sparkle of the sunlight on the delicate blonde fuzz on her forearms, turning her head from one side to the other, her lips parting a little. "Is that the only reason you're nice to me? Because I commanded you to be nice?"

"No-o-o. Not exactly," said the man. "It's hard to say. At first I thought this was kind of cheap. But now I think you're quite a person." He hesitated, "And I could look at you all day long." He smiled down at her, running his eyes over the top half of her nakedness. "I never get tired of looking at you," he went on. "You're Something."

"I thought I was, too," said Letia. Maybe she wouldn't have to beat him after all. She stretched again, this time with an unconsciously sinuous movement. "What else do you like about me, Solomon?"

"I like your nerve," he said and laughed again because of the way the phrase came out.

"I didn't mean that the way it sounded. I mean I think you've got something other women haven't got—other people, actually—not just your looks. Not just the body you come in. I admire you, mam."

Letia raised herself so that, sitting upright, facing him, she was very close. She could smell the warm smells of their bodies in the sun mingling with the last faint traces of her own perfume. Solomon wore only his white duck sailor's pants. His body was a deeper, richer brown than hers.

"I admire you, too, darling. Very, very much," she said, her eyes meeting his.

The man recoiled just a fraction. Something went wrong in him. Perhaps he could not have said what it was but what he did say was:

"Look. Letia, there's no use my kidding you. I *do* think you're swell and I *do* admire you. You've made a lot out of your young life. But I'm not in love with you, darling. I thought I might get to be but I'm not. I don't even like you, really . . . I think."

He might have slapped her. Anger rose up in her while she

still had half a smile on her lips and in her eyes. She took hold of him by the shoulders and shook him as she had shaken the little boy who'd been her first caller.

"God damn you," she said, "what do you mean you don't like me?"

"Cleopatra, please," said the man. "You asked me to come clean with you. I'm sorry. I'm awfully sorry."

"You're *sorry*!" Letia snapped at him. "How dare you talk to me like that?"

"I said I was sorry—and I am," the man said, uncomfortably.

Furious, Letia sat back and surveyed him, looked him over from crossed legs to tangled brown hair. Then, very coldly, she said:

"All right, if I have to have it this way, I have to have it this way. I command you to come here next to me. You don't dislike me too much for that, do you?"

The man looked suddenly as angry as she.

"No," he said. "No, I don't."

Then, still more angry, "Now stop it, Letia, stop it."

"I said 'I command you,'" said Letia, bitterly. "I'm not going to go on like this. I'm not going to go on like a school-girl. Don't you know anything about how women feel? Didn't you ever read any books? . . . before you became a servant?"

"Letia . . ." he started to say.

"You *are* a servant, you know," she said savagely. "We're not just playing at that. And I have plenty of money to pay you. What *is* the usual price?"

There was a moment's silence and neither of them heard consciously the lapping of the little waves against the hull or the softer music still of the light breeze in what the *Miramar* carried for rigging.

Then Solomon Janeway grinned.

"Yes, mam," he said, "I expect it comes with the charter. At least they're always kidding about such things around the docks."

"Come here and lie next to me," said Letia, "and we'll find out who's kidding." Her voice was uncertain but no one could have doubted her determination.

"Okay, Cleopatra," said Solomon.

Afterwards it was worse than before for Letia because it appeared to have made so little difference to Solomon. He

betrayed no emotion at all as he stowed away the luncheon things and rolled up the kapok mat and pulled the small anchor up from where it had lain on the rocky bottom. Only then did he come down to see how she was in the cabin where she'd gone to find a hat to keep the sun out of her eyes. He kissed her solemnly.

"There is no extra charge for that, Madam," he said. But he seemed more friendly than mocking. "I must admit there's a lot to be said in favor of your way of living, Cleopatra."

"You still work for me, you know," said Letia, trying to make her words sound friendly, too. "Please don't be too familiar."

"A good servant never forgets who he is," said Solomon. "I haven't."

Nor did Solomon Janeway ever really forget, even though, after the second time, they were both much less self-conscious.

So Letia felt as if she had her work to do all over again, as if she had got nowhere in her quest for Solomon Janeway's soul, and possibly her own. The days continued to add up into weeks, and the fourth week of her vacation, which was to be the last, began.

The first Letia knew about the hurricane coming was about 11 o'clock in the morning when they were trolling just in sight of land a few miles north of Matecumbe. It was a gray day and gusty but otherwise undistinguished. Solomon said conversationally, "It would be funny if it hit here again. I was in Jacksonville the last time. I missed it."

"Missed what?" said Letia.

"The Matecumbe blow," said Solomon. "Last night they said it would pass south of here—or I wouldn't have taken you out—but now it feels as if it was coming our way. You can feel a hurricane."

"You mean a *real* hurricane?"

"A real hurricane. Would you like that, Cleopatra? Would you like it to blow just for you?"

Letia did not answer him because it was a new idea that anything could happen to disturb their days. But when the wind began really to blow she knew she was frightened. The little *Miramar* rose up on the big waves and from the crests she could see nothing but other big waves, rising and breaking. It began to drizzle.

For many weeks now Letia had lived in a kind of dream

world in which the only realities were Solomon and the *Miramar*. The gray sky and the hard, wet wind were like the heavy hand of reality shaking her. It shook her suddenly back through the weeks to the first day when she had been Letia Phelps, not Cleopatra, and the *Miramar* was just an uncomfortable platform on which she was passing the time. It shook her back to the day when Solomon Janeway was just an irritatingly polite boatman and not a symbol of her impotence as a woman. It shook awake a harsh desire to live and a fear of dying.

The wind continued to rise and when the *Miramar* slid from one high crest into the trough behind the wave, the next wave loomed over it heavy and green, reaching up into the sky, blotting it out. The drizzle turned to driving rain. The air was a haze of white spindrift. Solomon had long since stored away the fishing gear and made her come and sit across from him, braced in the corner, holding the grab rail with both hands.

Suddenly it came to Letia that although the weather was getting terrifyingly worse, Solomon seemed to be doing nothing about it. From the crest of the next wave she could see no sign of land.

She said sharply, "Solomon, we're going in, aren't we?"

Solomon was not smiling. He shook his head, not moving his eyes from the water through which the *Miramar* churned at half throttle.

"No," he shouted.

"You're crazy!" said Letia. "We can't stay out in this!"

She had wrapped herself in a trench coat that belonged to Solomon, but she was shivering with cold and every few minutes her teeth would chatter. She felt blue with cold.

The man at the wheel did not change his expression. He shouted back, the corner of his mouth twisting, "Can't go in. Not safe to go in. We'll be all right here. This is a good hull."

Then, as if he wanted to explain everything to her so she would not be frightened more than she was, he added, "I'm keeping her at half throttle as long as I can . . . to save fuel. There's enough. We've three hundred gallons."

Letia only half heard him. All the aggressiveness in her nature rallied to her own protection. She gripped the side of the boat and leaned forward, squinting this way and that into the mist. At first, the wind blinded her, but as the water threw

them again up into the sky, she finally caught a single glimpse of the shore. It made a dark, hazy line as the wind suddenly abated and made it visible.

She saw that they were not far from land of some kind and she thought she saw, through the spray, the silhouette of buildings which could be her own camp on Matecumbe. The bow of the *Miramar*, teetering on the top of the wave, pointed in almost exactly the opposite direction from these silhouettes. The significance of the way the *Miramar* was pointed bore down on her, just as they started the sickening slide down the back side of the wave and the wind began to blow hard again after the lull and everything except the closest waves became invisible in the spray.

"Solomon," she screamed, "you're headed out to sea. That's the shore back there."

"That's right," Solomon yelled back at her. "But we can stay off all right. I've got lots more power than I'm using." Then seeing that she did not comprehend, "We're standing out to sea," he said.

"I know, you idiot!" Letia shouted. "That's what I'm trying to tell you. If the wind gets any worse, we'll be blown out to sea."

Again the man shook his head, "No use going ashore. Hurricane's coming this way all right. On shore, sure to be smashed. We might be able to get in still, but worst of it would catch us there."

Letia's teeth were chattering steadily now but her shivering was purely physical. Inside, her determination, hard and calm, was held in a vise by her furious instinct for self-preservation. She had only what she knew to preserve her, and her mind would accept no new facts beyond what she was already certain of. She was certain that it would be safer on shore and that, before everything else, she had to have solid ground under her. She was certain also that she was the master, not in the half-in-play sense as Cleopatra, but in the hard reality of herself as Letia, of whom no man was master, certainly not this stranger in the white sailor's pants and the gray turtle-neck sweater, braced there with her fate in his two hands, twisting the little wheel that could steer her to safety. Her nostrils dilated and her lips compressed into a cold thin line.

Holding hard with her right hand on the ladder rail, Letia swung herself across the cabin and reached with her left to

the brass throttle handle on the instrument panel. She pulled the handle sharply toward her as far as it would go. The *Miramar* vibrated with the flow of power into its big diesel engine and it rose more rapidly up the hillside of water facing it.

"Now, put her about and head for shore," she said. "Take me in."

Solomon's hand went down from the wheel onto hers on the engine throttle and his blue eyes flashed with anger a few inches from hers.

"Get away from that throttle," he roared. "Get below! Get out of here!"

Letia's whole personality rose to meet him. It could have been in panic or it could have been in an exhibition of sheer will, but her eyes held his, hard, angry, and absolutely unequivocal.

"I order you to take me in." Unconsciously her language was a soldier's.

Solomon's hand was still on hers on the little lever made of brass. Her raincoat had fallen away; the muscles of her bare arm were drawn tight, holding the lever where she had pulled it. The man was quite strong enough to have wrenched it from her. He was strong enough to lift a 75-pound sailfish aboard with one hand. And he was still master of the wheel itself.

Solomon's whole life and what he had made of it may well have passed in review before him in those few seconds. Certainly he had the absolute security of knowing what he was doing, of why he was doing it, and the physical power to have enforced his will. There was only one way to save the *Miramar* and that was to keep it at sea, to ride out the wind in a hull which he knew was strong enough to stand it.

But whatever went through his mind, what Solomon Jane-way did was to take his hand from where it had gripped hers, let it drop first to his side, and then, tensing the muscles, return it to the wheel so that he held the wheel again in both hands. And holding the wheel in both hands and not again touching the throttle, he eased the *Miramar* about, taking one wave after another, full throttle, and now finally racing the waves themselves in their mad thundering toward the shore.

The center of the storm crossed the Keys, some miles to the south of Matecumbe. At Matecumbe the wind blew first from

the Atlantic and then, reversing itself, shrieked past in the opposite direction. The highest velocity it reached at Matecumbe was 125 miles per hour, and then only briefly. The peak of this wind was still some hours away when the *Miramar* came at last into the channel which led to land and the water under it was only an angry, white snarl and no longer a deep oily green.

Even so, Solomon could not make the dock. He came into Hawk Channel, south of Alligator Light, and the first miracle was that he got through at all. He had, of course, no chance of making a respectable landing.

The *Miramar* came into the beach with its motor racing as the last waves lifted the propeller clear and they drove up into the sand, physically into it, for there seemed as much sand in the air above the beach as on the beach itself now. But the *Miramar* raised up on something solid underneath it, hit almost vertical, and only then lurched onto its side, half rolling in wind and water.

In the hospital, by the discolorations on her body, they could almost trace where Letia had been thrown, but she did not recall having been hurt but only knowing that they had made it. She and Solomon got somehow over the gunwale together, near the stern, onto the beach. She was quite adequate physically to the crawl across the beach, past the first palms bent double away from the sea, the leaves of each a horizontal plume, and on up across the tiny lawn, on her hands and knees, to the two steps up to the bungalow.

She remembers that she was lying there in the hallway, heaving for breath, when Solomon put the life preserver over her head. He turned her roughly on her back, swinging her over with his fingers biting into her shoulder. She saw his hands with the two tapes of the life preserver cross her chest. She remembers saying, "You fool, what's this for? We're on dry land now, you ass!" But she had not been able to undo his knots even though she tried and he was gone again by the time she had her breath back.

Then there was the hour in which she tried to find Susan and the others. They were nowhere in the house. And all the fear she had had at sea had come back again, only infinitely worse because there was no place else to go now and every corner of the little house seemed filled with the crackling of

breaking timber, silhouetted in sound against the heavy roar of masses of air passing rapidly by.

Then the wind died down and it was still and then the wind commenced to blow again and now it seemed doubly terrifying. It did not mean anything to Letia that it was blowing in the opposite direction.

It was after she had first failed to find any trace of the servants—they had been taken to a safer place by a wary neighbor almost an hour before she had landed—that she remembered Solomon's telephoning at night and asked the instrument for the meteorological station at Key West. The girl at the switchboard had said, "Jesus, where are you?" and had not waited for an answer. Letia had asked the voice from Key West where the storm was going to be worst. She said, "I'm at Matecumbe." He said, "At Matecumbe, mam, you're too close." He also told her to get out quick but there had been no place to go.

She was kneeling by the window in her bedroom when the house finally tore loose. It seemed to rise under her like some nightmare of a magic carpet and as it twisted across the lawn and skewed sideways across the beach, she saw Solomon Janeway one more time. She saw him through a yellow mist of sand only a few feet away, lying still, on his stomach, his arms over his head to protect it. He seemed to have edged himself as far as he could under the half-capsized hull of the *Miramar*, choosing that place as protection.

On her knees, she saw him through the window frame from which the glass had long since gone and his face was turned toward her and they looked at each other for a strange second. Then slowly and almost gracefully, to the awful music of the wind and the rain and the sand, the round hull of the *Miramar* rolled toward her and she saw the lapped siding on the hull flatten the man under it. She saw his eyes widen and the agony come into his mouth and then she knelt facing only the deck of the *Miramar*, now standing straight up and down as the boat lay on its side on its one-time owner.

The snagged bungalow stayed so for some moments. Perhaps the piling of the old pier held it for a little. Then it lifted again and finally Letia was for the second time at sea in a hurricane.

She has no memories of how this second trip began except that first she was in a room clinging to a window sill and then

she was clinging to the window sill and there was no room around her, only water blinding her. Finally there was no window sill and later, for a time, no consciousness at all. But the big collar of the life preserver, which was like a pillow in the nape of her neck, kept her face always toward the sky and she did not drown. After not a great many hours, the high wind abated and there was only an unusually heavy, breaking sea to buffet her about. At last, the Coast Guard aircraft came down to look at the speck she made and presently a cutter came to pick her up. She was well out of sight of land when they found her and she had been in the water forty-nine hours in all.

*Sturges Makes a Small Touch*

THE NEXT FEW pages can if necessary be skipped. Therein the reader will find a recapitulation of the vital statistics of Facts, Inc., its financial condition, and the financial condition of its founder and publisher, Sturges Strong, during its first nine years. This section is included for people with orderly minds.

By the fall of 1931, *Facts, The Knowing Weekly*, had nearly bankrupted the company that published it. Exactly six years later, figuring its value at an optimistic twenty times its annual earnings, it could be said to be "worth" \$40,000,000—and getting more valuable every year.

The odds against such a success in the magazine publishing field must be several hundred to one—that is to say that, during the last twenty years, hundreds of new magazines have been financed and published but you can count the real successes on the fingers of one hand. When they are successful, however, their successes are usually financially dramatic: like boring an oil well in the right place, the initial investment in equipment is fantastically modest when compared with the return. But unlike drilling an oil well in the right place, publishing successes are never achieved—there is no exception to this rule—without extraordinary efforts on the part of the architects of their success.

It is all very well to say that Sturges Strong got rich too rapidly—for his own good, or for the good of society—but as you will see, it took him almost a solid ten years of uninterrupted effort, and, even then, only certain fortuitous circumstances pulled him through to win a bet with the odds several hundred to one against him. By the rules of the game, he was certainly entitled to what he got. The best case against the rules, in the particular kind of publishing that Sturges was engaged in, is that they give the power to influence public opinion as a kind of bonus along with the financial reward. The question must always arise as to whether Sturges' years of preoccupation with *Facts, The Knowing Weekly*, was the

best training he could have had to fit him for the position of enormous power he eventually achieved—by virtue of the fact that he made his multiplied millions manufacturing words instead of shoes or electric irons or even loaves of bread.

Here is how Sturges Strong—and Facts, Inc.—survived the quixotic resignation of Strong's original partner, Allen Bishop. The principal events that preceded and immediately followed it were these:

*In November of '30, Facts* celebrated its first anniversary. Its net paid circulation was 42,529 that week and it needed at least 100,000 to succeed. Not until it had considerably more than that would it be able to guarantee to advertisers that 100,000 prospective buyers read *Facts*, and so be able to price its page rates accordingly—and hope to get business enough to make up for what it would still be losing on its circulation. Moreover, even after it got its 100,000 ABC,\* it would take at least a year for *Facts* to eat its way out of the red because, in the magazine world, advertising rates are guaranteed that far ahead. Thus for twelve months *after Facts* would be able to set a profitable higher price based on 100,000 readers, *Facts* would have to go on printing the advertising sold at the old low rates, each week (if the circulation continued to rise) at a greater and greater loss to itself.

Things looked very bad and there was a great deal of talk around town that *Facts* would fold.

By March of '31, *Facts'* circulation had dropped to below 33,000. The third issue in March was the all-time low: 32,128. Despite this, news stand sales both in Washington, D. C., and New York City improved slightly.

*In April of '31, Facts'* spring mailing for new subscribers was unexpectedly successful and news stand sales improved everywhere. *Facts'* circulation rose—to almost the figure it had passed, going down, on its first anniversary.

*On the 2nd of June, 1931,* Allen Bishop took his fiancée, Mary Van Voort, to the St. Regis to dinner to celebrate the anniversary of their engagement.

*On the 3rd of June,* Allen and Sturges had their row—and Allen disappeared from the offices of Facts, Inc.

*By the 16th of June,* Mary had decided that it was Sturges

\* Audit Bureau of Circulations—an organization which audits and then endorses the circulation figures on which magazines price their advertising.

for whom she had really cared all the time, and had told her father that she was going to marry Sturges right away if he asked her.

*On the 22nd of June*, Sturges asked her.

*On the 27th*, Sturges and Mary were married. Sturges had tried very hard to get in touch with Allen to tell him what had happened but was unable to locate him.

*On the 29th*, Sturges and Mary returned to Facts, Inc., after a twenty-four-hour honeymoon in the St. Regis Hotel in New York. It must be said for both of them that they had not let the very trying experience they had been through interfere with their work. They could hardly have afforded to; *Facts'* affairs were approaching a crisis. The weekly loss had risen to \$2,000 and the original quarter of a million capital would already be reduced to under \$50,000 if all outstanding bills were paid. Besides, Allen's unreasonable desertion had left Sturges to carry the whole burden of *Facts* alone.

*On the 2nd of July*, Allen returned from Key West where he had been fishing—out of sight of land for most of the month. His subsequent announcement that his stock in Facts, Inc., was for sale was impulsive, but soon after his return to Key West, he telegraphed his father to confirm it. This telegram Allen's father at first considered boyishly optimistic, for no demand whatever then existed for Allen's, or anyone else's, stock in *Facts*. *The Knowing Weekly* had apparently five months at the most to live, and two of its stock-holding directors had already begun to sound out Henry Luce and Vincent Astor to see how much (if anything) either *Time* or *Newsweek* would pay for *Facts'* somewhat nebulous assets.

*During the week beginning August 17*, the directors of *Facts* met for lunch in the private dining room in 21 West 52nd Street and the lawyer representing the dissatisfied stockholders told Sturges that, in his opinion, negotiations for the sale of *Facts* to either Astor and Harriman (of *Newsweek*) or Henry Luce (of *Time*) should be pressed. Sturges' father-in-law, alone amongst the directors, actively dissented. On Van Voort's authority, the directors then authorized Sturges to spend all of the company's remaining assets on one last effort to put *Facts* over. Fall is the season when all magazine circulations tend to rise again after the summer slump. The month of September was designated for the final effort. Thousands of dollars' worth of advertising was to be bought that month

to call the trade's attention, one last time, to *Facts*, *The Knowing Weekly*.

On the 2nd of September of 1931—that most eventful year for Sturges Strong and Facts, Inc.—Vandemeer Van Voort dropped dead and his only daughter, Mary Van Voort Strong, became his sole heir. The executors, however, had to inform Mrs. Strong that her father's fortune was drastically reduced from what it had once been. After the will had been probated and the inheritance tax paid, they estimated that there would be little more than one tenth of a million remaining. What there was left was principally in good sound securities but the estate did include some questionable items—such as the old man's holdings in Facts, Inc. The rather curious thing about the latter was that while Van Voort had hung on to the note that witnessed his original loan to his son-in-law's company, he had disposed of half of the common stock that went with it. Earlier in the depression, he had succeeded in hornswoggling his broker into accepting this dubious stock in trade for some hard cash to support an ailing margin account.

On the 12th of September, the first of four optimistic advertisements, published in *The New York Times* but directed at the trade, announced *Facts'* rebirth as the “dynamic advertising medium,” read by “knowing people.” Simultaneously, an ambitious mailing solicited the patronage of the knowing people themselves. Everyone in the magazine world knew that *Facts* was shooting its last bolt.

By the last week in September, *Facts'* advertising salesmen had the statistics they needed to argue that the bolt had hit the target. *Facts'* circulation had climbed sharply for three successive issues—41,000 for September 12; 54,000 for September 19; 76,000 for September 26—and its subscription renewal rate was almost as high as *Time's*. Some new subscriptions were actually coming in unsolicited.

Early in October, on the strength of these figures—and projecting their circulation curve into a now optimistic future—*Facts* guaranteed prospective advertisers that they would deliver 100,000 ABC for 1932, upped 1932 rates accordingly, and the bank which was the executor of the Van Voort estate agreed to put up the cash the company would need while waiting for its new prosperity to catch up with it. Actually, what the bank did was to lend the money to Mary Strong,

who assigned an interest of \$100,000 in her inheritance as collateral for the loan. Mary Strong then lent the same money to her husband's company. The owners and proprietors of *Facts*, *The Knowing Weekly*, were a long way from being out of the woods, but barring unforeseen circumstances, after this small touch, everyone was now sure that they would make it.

By mid-October, Sturges had got in touch with Allen Bishop, Sr., in Boston and asked him to set a price on his son's stock in Facts, Inc. Allen Bishop, Sr., who had once wondered whether the stock was worth anything, now named a round \$100,000 as his son's price. Sturges was probably right when he told Mary that it was malicious of Bishop, Sr., to stipulate such a high figure. It was a hold-up! Strong and Bishop each owned 25 per cent of the common stock, the investors who had put up the original quarter of a million having gotten notes for the money with the other half of the common stock then split among them. With the stock which Mary inherited from her father, and which she had promised to make over to Sturges as soon as the estate cleared, Sturges would have 37 per cent of the equity in *Facts*. But for reasons that were peculiar to him, he now wanted a clear 51 per cent. He felt he *had* to have Allen's stock, too—or at least a good chunk of it.

After some further correspondence, Sturges sent Mr. Bishop, Sr., a check for \$10,000 to secure an option on Allen's stock, good for six months. To take up the option, he borrowed all he could on his own stock, which his bank thought worth considerably less than Mr. Bishop did. He then organized a syndicate among his associates to subscribe the balance. In this way, early in 1932, Sturges managed to secure title to over 50 per cent of the common stock of Facts, Inc., at the same time seeing to it that another substantial block was safely tucked away in the names of his associates and employees. Never again, he swore, would a board of directors of Facts, Inc., be in a position to argue the destinies of the company with him, as they had at that tense meeting in August. But for his father-in-law's steadfastness, they might have sold him down the river!

The day the deal was closed, Sturges noted:

(A) That he was in debt for the then colossal amount of

\$50,000, all his new as well as his original stock in the company being pledged as collateral.

(B) That his wife, Mary, owed *her* bank, and had loaned Facts, Inc., exactly twice that much. This was the amount which the executors of her father's will told her would barely be covered by the estate.

Sturges and Mary, then, were flat broke and lived on Sturges' salary from Facts, Inc. He still paid himself only \$5,200 a year and some expenses. He would never again be that poor but he would feel like it for some years to come.

*Throughout the balance of 1932*, the earnings' statement of Facts, Inc., continued to show improvement. The last six months of the year, its operations practically broke even.

*Early in 1933*, Facts, Inc., experienced the thrill of its first profitable four weeks' period. The net take that period was \$416.43, but for the year it would be over \$50,000.

*In 1934*, Facts, Inc., made over \$200,000 net before taxes, and Sturges directed its directors to begin paying off the notes on which the original capital had been raised.

*In 1935*, Facts, Inc., made almost \$600,000 net before taxes and completed the reimbursement of the original investors. These payments gave the estate of the late Vandemeer Van Voort a whole \$125,000 in cash—a very fortunate circumstance for the bank that had made the loan to Mary against it, because the liquidation had not gone as well as the executors had expected. After liquidating her loan, and paying all the bills, the sum of \$30,000 was turned over to Mary Van Voort Strong free and clear. She now also collected an additional \$100,000 on her own personal loan to her husband's company so she was in much better shape than she had been. But when she foolishly let her father's one-time broker try to pyramid this sum in the market, because she felt guilty about being so much poorer than when Sturges had married her, all but a small fraction of it disappeared, and for practical purposes Mary was busted again. The one asset she might have now have reckoned as solid—the remnant of her father's common stock in *Facts*—she had made over to her husband the day after it had come into her possession.

*In 1936*, *Facts* paid its first dividends, a modest fifty cents on each of its 200,000 shares. It had made not quite a million dollars. On his 104,000 shares, Sturges got \$52,000 in dividends. That year he also paid himself \$25,000 in salary. He had

drawn only \$15,000 in salary the year before, profitable though *Facts*, Inc., had been. He now finished paying off his own loan, the loan he had made to buy his original partner's stock. It was the Van Voort fortune which had seen him through for, although his own borrowing had been against his own stock, the whole situation had been dependent on Mary's loan to *Facts*, Inc., in the time of its crisis. Without her loyalty to defend him from them, either of the two original stockholders who had once planned to sell *Facts* to the competition would have been happy to have squeezed Sturges out of control.

By the end of the first quarter of 1937, there was business enough on *Facts'* books to indicate that it would make \$2,000,000 that year. Its circulation had topped 400,000 and was, of course, still growing. For personal reasons, Sturges Strong decided it was time to alter its character. He announced the introduction of an editorial page and the addition of signed articles. Both of these innovations were successfully assimilated.

In 1938, *Facts* made well over \$3,000,000 net—with the future brighter than ever. If he had paid out, in dividends, all that was earned—and he had the right to—Sturges' gross income would have been:

Over \$1,650,000 from his <i>Facts</i> , Inc., stock
and       50,000 from his <i>Facts</i> , Inc., salary
Total \$1,700,000

Actually it was:

\$260,000 in dividends
50,000 in salary
Total \$310,000 gross—or \$167,420 net after taxes.

So much for the financial rise of Sturges Strong to the year 1938.

After Allen Bishop had gone from *Facts* for good, Sturges had no time whatever for introspection. Despite his own qualifications as an editor for *Facts*, he had accepted Allen's leadership unquestioningly, and now he had to take over Allen's job without any training for it. Moreover, Allen had always had the kind of authority over Sturges that his father had had when Sturges was a small boy. Now Sturges had

suddenly usurped his father's place, even to having taken his father's woman to wife. He sat at his father's desk all day and Mary, who might have been his mother, lay in bed with him at night. He had no idea that he had been as frightened of Allen as he had been of his father, or that he had coveted the woman who belonged to Allen. The authority of his real father, he had run away from; Allen's authority, he had now killed. He was grown.

Under other circumstances Sturges' immediate reaction might have been one of intense guilt. At *Facts*, however, the timing was such that Sturges' emotional reactions were submerged under his own imperative necessity to survive. It required his total consciousness to survive: to master the weekly creation of the magazine, to learn what values in it appealed to the public and how to dominate an organization which would be able to duplicate them indefinitely. In the civilized terms he dealt in, his very life depended, for a time, on his succeeding.

Sitting at the head of a group of writers whom another man had brought together, responsible for a weekly publication which he understood only in the vulgarest terms, he mastered both by sheer concentration and power of will. He *really* mastered them—until they were his.

Allen had inspired and led by superior talent and understanding. Sturges, having neither, hammered his way to the real authority he acquired. He literally beat down the problems that faced him. For Allen's casual administration, Sturges substituted a week which began with twelve-hour-long conferences and ended with a magazine, every single word of which Sturges himself had read, and which he passed for publication only because neither he nor anyone else around could think of a better. During the twelve-hour conference, Sturges sat at the head of a long table and each writer and Fact-Finder in turn appeared there before him—to recite, to be questioned, to be bullied, to be cross-questioned, to be pounded and trodden on until at last the kernel that seemed to Sturges the truth was all that remained.

Then came the equally disciplined and painful reassembly of the kernels of the Truth according to Saint Sturges into the weekly Gospel according to *Facts*.

At first Sturges' staff, angry over his treatment of Allen, were sullen and resentful. But like Sturges' instructors at

New Haven, they found him impossible to deny. He had more curiosity than they, more insistence, more vitality. They had no choice but to respect him, and when they did their best work, when they had thought most logically and expressed themselves most succinctly, Sturges respected them. Then he praised them, and was almost humble with them, for a brief moment before the reservoir of his arrogant curiosity filled again.

Amongst Allen's people, there were a few who could not take it. They found Sturges' logic impossible to meet but still they could not bring themselves to accept it. They were certain that there were other values—in life, in their times, and in writing of them—that were beyond Sturges, that could not be captured by the formula he was evolving. They were not, however, up to substituting, or even to articulating, a counter-philosophy. On the early *Facts*, everyone was young and only Sturges was sure of his importance. So the more sensitive dropped out of *Facts'* organization, one by one.

All this is written not to attack but in defense of Sturges Strong. His detractors have described him as a man who rose to eminence on the accomplishments of others. He did no such thing. Between 1931 and 1935 he and no other man made *Facts* what it is today, the original breadwinner in a publishing house which now earns \$20,000,000 net a year. It is foolish to say—as Allen Bishop's friends, of course, did say—that Allen had really created the magazine and that Sturges had simply sat there until it had become a success and he could collect the dividends. For all his contributions, it is doubtful if Allen could ever have made *Facts* successful by himself. The venture as a whole never meant enough to him.

This is proved, of course, by what Allen Bishop did with his life after his break with Sturges. A man with the enterprise to make a commercial success of *Facts* would never have battered around for so many years and ended as a script writer in Hollywood, however successful a one.

The price Sturges paid for his first success was altogether psychological, unless you think of the kind of social self-ostracism he endured as a debit to his account. To achieve the concentration he had to achieve to make *Facts* his own, and a worldly success to boot, Sturges had again to cease growing, to submerge every human instinct.

And what about poor Mary during her husband's titanic

battle to survive? Life would have been easier for her if all she had to endure was Sturges' preoccupation with his work. But he was nagged by yet another devil and it was this devil which made things hardest for Mary, because it had a hold on her too. The troublesome devil, the devil whose attentions they shared, was fear for their solvency. They had gone so nearly broke; they had had to borrow so much money! Mary never was to recover entirely from the shock of learning of her father's losses, of seeing even the diminished estate he had left dwindle into insignificance. With Sturges it was not merely the threat of early ruin which affected him; that fear was compounded by the abortive effort of the dissident directors to sell the magazine out from under him before it had had a chance to prove itself. He could never forget how close a thing it was.

So the shakiness of their financial pyramid during the first years of their marriage profoundly affected the Stronges. For many years after the world and his bankers knew Sturges to be a millionaire in fact, and a multimillionaire in prospect, both he and his wife Mary thought themselves nothing of the kind.

For some time after they were married, Mary continued to head the Fact-Finders of *Facts*, but as the upward curve in the circulation continued, Mary agreed that it was now possible for her to turn over her old responsibilities and take up her new ones. Mary was a girl to whom the Establishment of a Home came definitely under the head of Responsibilities. It was Sturges, however, who had made the actual suggestion that she go. He found it made him distinctly uncomfortable to talk to the editorial employees of *Facts* with his wife in the office.

Once Mary had gone to their new home, and he himself had appointed her successor from amongst the Fact-Finders, Sturges' uniform of chief executive of Facts, Inc. fitted him better.

Sturges had originally taken his bride back to the room where she had visited him on the anniversary of her engagement to Allen. Presently the Stronges had expanded into deluxe chambers on the second floor, consisting of a big living room on the side street, with a small bedroom and a still smaller kitchen to the rear of it. To reach the kitchen, one had to pass through the bedroom.

Mary bore Sturges both a son and a daughter—it was a source of wonder to his associates how he ever managed the time to get his wife pregnant—and to make room for them, they engaged the two rooms to the rear of their own on the same floor. Mary was a very busy girl, and not an unhappy one. She had all the outlets she needed for her Spartan energy and all the opportunity she required to make sacrifices to her conscience. She soon lost all her former interest in *Facts* magazine, substituting a similar preoccupation with the household on East 35th Street. She was very respectful to her husband and felt that the really important thing was that she arrange their life so that she should never be a problem to him. Nothing she said or did, nor anything that happened in their house, should be allowed to take his mind off the undertaking that was so important to them both.

Whether Sturges understood her decision or not, he felt it and was grateful. Mary's self-effacement made it possible for him to think again about the problems of his own soul after he realized he had solved the principal problems of his first magazine.

It was his senior editor, Jim McNulty, who actually started Sturges off again in search of his soul. Once upon a time McNulty had believed in Allen's version of *Facts*. He had first resigned himself to Sturges' editing, then switched his allegiance to it. He had come honestly to believe that the coarse bluntness of Sturges' *Facts* was vital to its commercial success, and he did not question the rightness of any commercial success. But still he had an intellectual side and a kind of integrity, and he thought that something of more lasting value could be built on *Facts*' foundations. His suggestion to Sturges was that they experiment with adding an editorial page to the magazine and back it up with signed articles which would add up the facts that *Facts* gathered.

In the middle Thirties, the American people had just begun to recover from the collapse of the great dream of eternal prosperity they had had ten years before; Roosevelt and the New Deal were in the saddle and there was a new awareness in the world that man might be called on to do something about his fate besides leave it to the ruthlessness of supply and demand. McNulty was a kind of right-wing New Dealer who believed in the necessity of social experimentation, even

though he instinctively recoiled from the extremes to which Roosevelt went.

Strong heard out McNulty's idea as he always heard out the ideas of all his staff, listening intently, concentrating on his hunt for inconsistency and vagueness, poised to decide what was practical and impractical. Still with his mind only, he saw that, publication-wise, McNulty's notions made sense. The leaders of American industry had been badly shaken. They had lost much of their confidence in themselves. Despite their background and training, their minds were open at last to the possibility that other ideas than their own existed. The proposal might mean a new dimension of growth for *Facts*; the additions that McNulty was suggesting could make the magazine indispensable, Strong thought, to the richest and most important people in the country. And if this could be done, the result would be an advertising salesman's field day.

On the other hand, *Facts* was already doing better than well enough and any change in policy involved a risk. On second thought the answer would surely be no. McNulty's notions included an ambitious advertising campaign as well as a heavy, and speculative, investment in editorial improvement. But just as Sturges was about to reject the notion once and for all, something happened that caused him to reconsider.

What happened might have seemed little enough to someone who did not know all the facts. It began with a letter from James Aloysius Falkenstall which began, "I know I am not an Eli, Sturges, but I couldn't help but be interested by the list of people to whom your Alma Mater is awarding honorary degrees this spring. It's in this morning's *Times*. (Forgive me for mentioning that—I know no facts escape *The Knowing Weekly*—but perhaps you haven't caught up with it yet.)

"There are some distinguished people on Yale's list this year," his letter continued, "but I couldn't find your name. They gave Harry Luce an M.A. years ago. It should be your turn, now that *Facts* is the success you have made it.

"I'm writing you this note impulsively to ask if you would mind my exploring the matter further . . ."

The letter went on to say that of course it wasn't for Sturges to do anything about, but that Falkenstall wanted to be sure that Sturges would have no objections.

Mr. Falkenstall of Wood, Wickersham, Root, Sullivan and Taft had maintained a position of strict neutrality in the

matter of which partner of Facts, Inc., was marrying Van Voort's daughter while he, Mr. Falkenstall, was marrying Van Voort's niece. The corporate entity of *Facts* had seemed to him more important than any of the individuals who comprised it, and now he wanted to see that the success of that corporation got the recognition due it.

It was this letter from a *Facts'* well-wisher that set off the train of circumstances. It was because of it that Sturges was invited the following fall to dine with some of his old professors in New Haven. They wanted to look him over again before sending his name up. It was because, when he got to New Haven on a warm October evening, Sturges chose to walk up from the station that he saw Joan again after all those years. He was on the opposite side of Chapel Street just beyond Center when he looked involuntarily across to the side-street door through which the employees of Malley's Department Store came and went to work, the door at which he himself had waited so often and so uneasily lest he be seen by a fellow undergraduate. And Joan had come through the doorway as he had been looking. She had not seen him. She simply walked to the Chapel Street corner and stood uncertainly for a moment, apparently undecided which way to turn from there.

It seemed a generation ago to Sturges, but she was really only a few years older than when he had known her. She had changed very little. Perhaps with a few years more of sophistication, she even dressed a little better. She had on a gay little summer print that was typical of her and wore no overcoat. She looked as pretty as ever but tired after a long day at the store, and she was alone and Sturges could have mistaken her momentary indecision for wistfulness. Anyway, his heart almost stopped when he saw her and he had a sensation of panic, almost of physical fear.

When Joan finally turned toward Church Street, in the opposite direction from the way he was going, he made no effort to follow her; he had not, in fact, done more than slow his own pace. Now he hastened on. He proceeded further than he meant to, entering the campus where he had been an undergraduate, winding his way past the post office and the buildings of the Sheffield Scientific School and thence, finally, on up the hill to where he was expected for dinner. All this way he could not stop himself from feeling the most tumultu-

ous emotions. Now it was as if no time had elapsed between the afternoon he had hung up the telephone in the drug store from which he had called Joan's house and got no reply, and this moment when he had seen her again. He was momentarily torn loose from all the experience that had come between.

To his old professors, Sturges seemed more incoherent than they remembered him, as they made conversation calculated to reassure themselves that they could with dignity sanction his name being included on the list of those to be honored the coming spring.

The fact that the disturbed Sturges made an indifferent impression on his old professors was not what kept him from being awarded the degree. Having been given to understand that everything was in order, it was rather a severe shock to him when, around the following Easter, Falkenstall asked him down to lunch at the Broad Street Club and told him something had gone wrong.

"I can't prove this, mind you," said Falkenstall. "They are as mysterious as can be about these things—but I have a hunch that some day we'll find Allen Bishop's father at the bottom of it. I picked up some gossip yesterday about Bishop's father having got to be a great friend of old Lyman's."

Falkenstall chatted on, making conversation, for he was aware that his client's face had grown a dull red and that he was obviously put out to the point of being inarticulate.

After he had seen Joan again, Sturges had had no choice but to relieve a little of his life. The memories of the year he had known her kept coming back to him. His first thoughts had been to wonder whether he had been right—whether he had not really been man enough to have taken Joan with him to New York *and* to have made *Facts* a success too. He had not reached a firm conclusion about this by the time he learned that he was not to get the honorary degree. For quite a while after he got that news he was just plain angry, angry at being crossed, angry at the unfairness of it.

Under the successive impacts of thinking about Joan again and of being reminded of the hostility of his one-time partner's father, Sturges began again to think about himself. There was a sudden and urgent need in his life for more than *Facts* could give him, a need, like Letia's, for a new direction to his life.

In part, with Sturges, this compulsion was for a success that was totally and wholly his own. In part it was once again his need for something around which to rebuild his faith.

The new *Facts* which McNulty proposed could be it. McNulty's sales talk made Sturges think once more of what he had once hoped publishing would mean to him—when, in the very beginning, he had thought that service of Literature might substitute for service of God. The refurbished *Facts* was to have the very best ideals that money could buy; it was to make a Real Contribution to Letters.

On these grounds, Sturges finally said O.K. to McNulty's program.

The new *Facts*, of course, proved to be even more successful commercially than the old, but it was an abysmal failure in the purpose for which Sturges approved its publication. Far from reviving Sturges' confidence in himself, it had almost the reverse effect. This was because McNulty, and the men Sturges had presently to hire as his associates to carry out the new policy, ran away with the magazine and made it theirs for a number of years. They understood what they were trying to do better than Sturges, and they were brighter than he. In the repackaging of news, Sturges had been able to dominate the staff and to impress his personality on the magazine by the sheer vitality of his curiosity. But in the world of ideas, in the literary world, the very world whose service meant so much to his soul, he was soon lost in his own literal-mindedness.

Sturges had originally planned to write all his own editorials, but his sense of self-preservation saved him from competing with McNulty and his men. His editorials just didn't come off. He had expected personally to order and buy the signed articles. But the intellectuals whom McNulty nominated as eligible drove Sturges crazy with their fancy talk. They were too full of qualifications, too unwilling to state a proposition baldly. And they talked and talked and talked. Sturges was soon happy to let McNulty handle such impossible people, and he could not understand how the public had ever come to make them famous.

Finally there was nothing left for him in the matrix of the new *Facts* but a place among the very intellectuals he despised, as an author in his own magazine. Grimly he began then the practice of reserving for himself the authorship of

two articles a year for *Facts*. These, for the good of his soul, he labored over and put first in his life, no matter what the demands of his other responsibilities. Getting out these articles remained, throughout the formative years of the new policy, the most trying problem with which *Facts'* editors had to contend.

Twice a year, like an amateur cook, Sturges moved into their kitchen to prepare his special dish, and before he was through he had used every pot and pan in the place and driven the hired help almost to distraction.

Each one of Sturges' articles had, by unwritten edict, to be one of the year's two most important. This could have been easily managed had the president of the company been content to let *Facts'* editors select the subject, gather the research, and assign one of their most skillful writers to organize it. But the whole reason why Sturges made these efforts was that the article should be *his*, and his alone. The professional cooks were not even allowed to add a pinch of salt, and yet in some way in which they could not understand, they knew that they would be held accountable for the result. If Sturges' articles were criticized elsewhere—as immature or ungraceful or lacking in soundness—the dismay of the proprietor could be felt all through the organization.

Only occasionally would Sturges be angry about a criticism; habitually he would be depressed and irritated. Never could he ignore or laugh off anything that was said about his efforts in print. He who was so thick-skinned personally, who had a reputation of being callous to the point of ruthlessness in hiring and firing, had the temperament of an aging prima donna when it came to comment on his literary efforts.

What saved Sturges from being destroyed altogether was that each failure drove him to a more ambitious attempt so that, before long, the articles that emerged from his typewriter were so heavily ballasted as to facts, so complicated as to steering mechanism, and so generally top-heavy and dull that they were less and less commented on by anyone one way or another. More and more of the world's alleged reaction could then be conveyed to Sturges by word of mouth and friendly politeness. He was soothed and, having thus been served some little success, his literary efforts lagged. The compulsion to produce them subsided.

Thus died gradually the service of Sturges Strong to creative writing and thinking as an Article of Faith.

Having no Allen Bishop this time to confess to, Sturges acknowledged this new loss of faith to himself alone. And once again he reminded himself that he had traded a fair life for it. After the new policy was a success, they figured in Wall Street that Facts, Inc., might be worth as much as \$50,000,000. Sturges owned a clear half of it.

Sturges' lieutenants were now also on their way to becoming millionaires. They owned stock in the company, the stock that Sturges had seen to it that they bought from Bishop's holdings, but they wanted more, and still more. They competed with one another for advantage; they drove themselves and drove the people under them until, in their preoccupation with recording what the world was doing, they forgot the world itself.

Out of this maelstrom of effort, Sturges Strong himself was the first to emerge. He was blown through to life's surface as a sand hog is blown out of his tunnel in the river bed, up through the slime and filth and the flowing water and out into the sunshine that sparkles on the surface of the river, propelled by the pressure of the air in the tunnel. The great pressure which blew Sturges through to the surface of life was the pressure of his accumulated, dammed-up riches. The very size of his bank balance shattered the illusion through which he was tunneling, the illusion that he was insecure and had no choice but to continue his efforts because his survival depended on it.

When they brought him the figures projecting his company's earnings through the year of 1938, so that he might prepare himself for the annual meeting with his stockholders, the fact of his riches stared Sturges in the face. He was many times a millionaire.

The year before, Sturges had moved Mary and the two children from East 35th Street to a still modest six-room apartment in East 71st Street. He had also purchased a small house for them to spend their summers in, in the hills inland of Greenwich, where Mary had grown up. But he had encouraged Mary to continue her economies. She still managed their household with the aid of a single inept old servant who had once been a retainer of the Van Voorts'. Sturges' sole extravagance to date, in fact, had been the purchase

of a new Pontiac, the extravagant part being that it had a convertible body, which was more expensive and less durable. The only conscious sense of pleasure that Sturges had, those days, came to him on sunny spring and summer Fridays when, with almost a guilty feeling, he would put down the top of his car and drive himself out to Mary by a long route, a detouring which sometimes took him fifty or sixty miles out of his way through the easy, sloping countryside.

When they brought Sturges the figures for the annual meeting, Mary and the children were still in New York. On the Friday following, Sturges expected to spend his usual day with them, his morning's sleep protected by a solicitous Mary. In the afternoon he would walk with her to pick up the children—little Sturges from the private school on 60th Street, Janice from the kindergarten which kept her until three. Then there would be the almost formal children's hour, with Mary the strict policeman of her offsprings' behavior—"What will your father think of you if you do this or that or the other thing?" Then the children would be hastened away so as not to tire their breadwinner, and he and Mary would dine with someone.

This particular Friday, Mary was dutifully agreeable, if disappointed, when Sturges told her that he had to go back to the office for a few hours.

"It is *such* a lovely day," she said wistfully.

Sturges did not go back to the office but walked east instead to the garage where he kept the Pontiac and in the Pontiac he drove alone for several hours, sometimes saying softly to himself, "But I can do anything I want now. I can go any place I want. I can do *anything* I want."

Falkenstall, who was the nearest thing to a friend that Sturges had then, had put him up for membership in the Racquet and Tennis Club. That winter Sturges had been elected a member. When Sturges finally came down from the slowly greening hills into the city, instead of going home he drove to the Racquet Club on Park Avenue at 52nd Street. He had been there only a few times, just often enough to have met one or two of Falkenstall's friends. He felt a sense of definite exhilaration as he halted his own car by the curb and walked into his own club, the doorman nodding respectfully. He was pleased that the doorman recognized him and

did not ask his name, even though he was such a new member.

Sturges had no idea what he was going to do next, but he felt a sense of new freedom. Whatever he did do next, the Racquet Club, with its reputation for gaiety and good living, would be a good place to start.

It was the hour at which the children would be getting out of school. There was only a lone old man reading a paper in the living room. Sturges proceeded up the broad stairs to the dressing room where the young men whom Falkenstall knew disrobed to sweat out their hangovers playing squash. Several of the brokers had come uptown early and a boy in a white jacket was serving them cocktails. They were already out of their street clothes and sat in wicker chairs around a table, clad in bathrobes made of white toweling.

Sturges was shy about joining them but one of the older men remembered him and nodded, "Hello, Strong. Join us for a quick one?"

This pleased Sturges even more than being recognized by the doorman.

After he had several Martinis he felt very fine and everyone was very correct and friendly. Two of the men went on to play squash. Others replaced them.

About the time that Mary called her friend to say that Sturges must still be at the office and that she was afraid that they couldn't make it, Sturges himself was enjoying a kind of approbation which was new to him. He was being congratulated on accepting an invitation to his sixth Martini and the world's possibilities for pleasure were definitely opening up.

Along about eight, Sturges and two of his new-found friends, spurning dinner as wasteful of the joy-of-life feeling they were experiencing, proceeded by taxicab to an unpretentious building on the far side of Central Park where an imperious old lady with natural red hair ran an establishment chiefly distinguished from others of its kind by the fact that the young ladies were all dressed in starched white uniforms and that genuine masseurs were also available. The rooms were filled with apparatus for exercising—weights to lift, handle bars to twist, oars to row—in order to support the illusion that it was a legal establishment.

Sturges' companions knew many gayer places but the hour

was awkward and the first telephone calls they put in were unrewarding. So they decided they would introduce him to Miss Swift's, which at least was reliable. It drew its clientele mainly from the older members of the Club who were less interested in pursuit than they'd once been, or who had developed eccentric tastes. Miss Swift was very understanding about rich men's idiosyncrasies.

Sturges thought everything about Swift's was wonderful and, drunk as he was, he remained extremely curious about how the business was operated. He debated seriously with himself while he was undressing whether it would make a better story as news or as a signed article in the new part of *Facts*. "The article," he explained out loud to a respectful and imaginary staff, "would of course take up the national aspects—the effect of prostitution on the social structure."

After they had visited Miss Swift's, the threesome proceeded to another favorite Racquet Club haunt, a small restaurant around the corner from the Club on 52nd Street. There, their appetites having been improved, they ate a very large dinner and Sturges said a reluctant good night when his companions had at last to leave him. It was almost midnight. Sturges picked up his car and drove himself home.

On the final leg of the journey, almost sober again, Sturges felt both guilty and apprehensive. He need not have. Mary was waiting up for him, of course, but it never occurred to her that Sturges had spent the day and evening anywhere but at his beloved *Facts*.

Thus Sturges found himself painlessly embarked upon his new career of man-about-town. It was not to be a very long one.

*Letia Conquers the Arts*

WHEN LETIA GOT out of the hospital, she felt terribly alone. Her business no longer had any reality to her and when she walked again through the swept-open door to Long House, she felt as if she were a first-time customer. The heavy-scented luxury of the salon struck her in the face as if it had been the blast of heat from the opening of a furnace. The anxiously smiling men and women who came running toward her, from behind counters, from back rooms, and down the dramatically curving stairs—and who halted awkwardly in a half-circle of concern and murmured solicitation—all of them seemed strangers. Even Sally Marchant seemed a stranger, even worried and practical Sally, who pushed herself through and took charge and shoved and shooed the others back even before she embraced Letia and linked arms with her and led her upstairs to her own office.

"You'd think they were monkeys, the way they rattle the bars of their cage," Sally snorted. "Anything for a chance to forget what they're here for. But they *do* love you, darling—and you *did* give us an awful fright."

Letia sat down behind the big desk which was so delicately upholstered in blue and laid her gloves and her bag on it. They rested alongside a foot-high pile of telegrams and selected mail which awaited her. It was like a star's return to her dressing room after a triumphant opening. The rest of the big office was blotted out with flowers, from customers, from wholesalers and manufacturers, from rivals.

On the desk itself, beyond the mail, there was a spray of gardenias with the card propped so that Letia saw it was from Randolph Phelps. Randy's engraved card, with his name scratched out and "Randy" sprawled across it in handwriting, was clipped to a big florist's card on which his new wife, Rosalie, had written:

"We were so worried about you. Please be careful next time. You're the only ex-wife Randy has."

Sally had singled out one other corsage for Letia's im-

mediate attention. It was an old-fashioned circle of paper stamped to look like lace, on which tiny rose buds and forget-me-nots and baby's breath had been built up into a bouquet for a young girl. The card was in an envelope which Letia opened. It read:

"A smart hurricane would have known better. My money was always on you. Affectionately, Joe."

"He was in here asking about you," said Sally in a smugly matter-of-fact tone. "He's gone to work on that dull rag they call *Facts*."

For three weeks in the hospital, Letia had had time to think. She had really made up her mind then. Orlando, who had flown all the way to Florida twice to see her, and who had met her plane that morning, had known that something was going on inside Letia but it was almost as much of a surprise to him as to Sally when Letia said:

"Well, I might as well tell you now and get it over with. I'm not coming back here."

Orlando snapped his fingers and said, "There goes the ball game."

Sally had to hear Letia say it several different ways before it sank in and then she began to whimper.

"Look, darlings," said Letia then, "I can't tell you exactly what's happened to me, except that I know how lucky I am to be alive at all. I'm living on borrowed time. That isn't just a thing to say—if you've ever been through it. I ought to be dead. I thought I *was* dead." She hesitated, thinking that her seriousness sounded out of place in these surroundings. Even her own thoughts, which had made such hard sense to her when she was lying in a hospital bed, seemed unreal now, but she had chosen her course of action and she was going to go through with it.

"If all I have left is borrowed time," she went on, "I don't propose to spend it making dresses. I have missed too many things in my life. I am going to start all over again."

"Like what?" Orlando asked.

"Like doing just exactly whatever I feel like doing—whatever that is." Letia eyed him calmly, as if preparing to put down an incipient rebellion.

"Sure, sure," Orlando's tone altered to one of pure curiosity, "but like what, baby?"

"It doesn't matter," said Letia.

"But you *can't* leave us, Letia," Sally wailed. "What'll we do without you? We've just got you back."

"We're going to sell Long House," Letia answered her. "To the highest bidder. The bank would probably lend you the money to buy it, Sally darling, but I'd rather sell it to someone who'd be tougher than you."

"I have no objection to getting a lot of money for this business," Letia went on. "I may need a lot of money before I'm through."

"Oh," said Orlando, who was more used to abrupt changes in Letia's course than Sally. "When do we start what? Am I still in the picture?"

Letia smiled, tolerantly.

"You're a darling," she said. "Now, Sally, pull yourself together. The first thing we're going to do is to spend the winter getting the stores to buy lots of things from us. Then next fall we'll see who needs the business most and we'll let them persuade us to sell out."

But although Letia had thought it all out, executing that part of the plan was, for once, beyond her. She could not get her mind back on Long House and sold it early in the first spring after her return, for notes and a promise not to compete. It was a syndicate of fabric makers who bought her out, and its arrangement to pay Letia a percentage of the profits over a fixed sum eventually ran her return to well over \$2,500,000. This is a small sum for Big Business, a colossal one for a couturiere's establishment, even one with a name which is important in the wholesale trade. Before or since, no one has ever done better. By her own wits, then—and the happenstance of selling her business nearly four years before Pearl Harbor—Letia made for herself an even greater fortune than that which Randolph Phelps had made over to her.

After Long House was sold, Letia had two fortunes; she did not set about spending either of them. She told Falkenstall to keep her money conservatively invested and limited herself to a scale of life which could be lived on less than half her income. Even the first year after her return, this gave her over \$7,000 a month to spend, which was a lot more than it cost to keep her bills paid.

At this period of her life, Letia lived more sensibly than before or after. She gave up her suite of rooms at the Plaza and moved Susan and herself to a penthouse apartment on

Madison Avenue at 70th Street. It cost her only \$400 a month in rent. The penthouse was a white elephant then. Its rooms were too large and there were not enough of them to accommodate a family. But Letia got on very well with the couple which old Towers at Phelps House had found for her, and Susan.

Because part of the deal by which she had disposed of Long House had been that she should design one more collection herself for the purchasers, Letia made one room of the penthouse—the room at the north that gave onto the garden part—into a studio. Because she had the studio but could not get her heart into the clothes she designed, she began again to paint for herself—in oils. She had not had a brush in her hand since she'd been a girl in Miss Roget's class in Morristown.

At first it was a kind of a lark. She went shopping on foot, tramping up and down Sixth Avenue, buying canvases and an easel and—before she was through—a van load of tubes of color. Her first effort was a portrait of Orlando for which he expected to sacrifice whole days of sitting still, it seemed suddenly to mean so much to Letia. She kept him motionless only an hour or two on three successive mornings and then announced she was through. Her original sketch had been a shrewd caricature—Letia had always had a flair for likeness and her pencil was practiced from her work as a designer—but the “finished” canvas looked as if Orlando had been pummeled purple. Its creator was outraged at her ineptness.

“Orlando,” she announced, “you’ve got to dig up some artists for me to work with. I’ve got to find out what’s wrong with me. This is fantastic. I know *exactly* what you look like but I can’t get it out of me onto that canvas. I did better when I was in high school.”

The only painters whom Orlando knew were stage designers, but these soon circulated the word that there was a rich dame up on 70th Street who was trying to learn to paint, a rich dame at whose place there was free food and drink, and who was also a blonde who would knock your eye out.

Letia had never known painters before, nor painters Letia, and the combination was an instant success. They immediately liked each other's frankness and unconventionality. It did not

take Letia many meetings to set the first arrivals straight on why they were there. After the best of them saw that she was serious about her work and really wanted to learn, they began to repay her hospitality with a genuine interest in her progress. She was almost humble while she was learning again, and there was no question at all but that she had talent.

Some of the artists had come with Orlando to Letia's, hoping she would buy their pictures. Several of these ended by giving Letia the portraits of her they could not resist painting. All of them marveled at two things about her: the speed with which she worked and her terrifying diligence. For weeks on end she would do two, and sometimes three or four, finished canvases a week. As each month passed, her work improved: her touch grew surer, her childhood facility came back to her.

Letia's final collection for Long House she threw at its new proprietors. She was now wholly absorbed in her painting. And it was but a step from the first spontaneous praise she got from her tutors to her thinking in terms of presenting her work to the public and capitalizing on it as a professional. Letia never liked to do things for nothing. She chose a conservative gallery, with only a sideline interest in contemporary painting, to represent her. That was how Knoedler's came to handle her.

Technique, of course, will never explain the popularity of Letia's work in oil. It is true that she acquired considerable skill, that her design was generally sound, and she had a natural sense of color. But as soon as her pictures pleased her, Letia began to study how to be a success with the public, and that success had a lot more to it than the things the world of art admires.

Letia Phelps was scornful of that world as she found it. The painters with the most reputation among their fellows seemed to have the hardest time disposing of their work. They all seemed to look down on the successful portrait painter, although he alone among them had a market for more canvases than he could produce. She admired the meticulousness of painters like Norman Rockwell but observed that because he drew covers for *The Saturday Evening Post*, many of her new friends did not regard him as an artist at all. She herself responded to the dramatic, restless colors of such painters as Joseph Floch, who was one of the most fatherly of her tutors, but it impressed her that despite his international fame, he was not rich. For her money, he wasted his time painting rocks

and you could hardly see the faces of his people. She was sure it was his own fault that he was not better off, his own fault for not applying his art to what interested people more than rocks. Quite consciously, then, Letia began to choose her subjects with an eye to what would make people talk about her pictures.

Probably what was irresistible to most laymen about Letia's work was that she did subjects that were exciting in themselves in a technique which was daring and just awkward enough to be discussed seriously as possibly important. On her route as a professional she took every short cut she could find to becoming a fad, and the fact of who she was and what she looked like did her no harm at all.

As soon as Letia's work began to be reproduced widely, and she began to get high prices, detractors appeared who said that Letia hired other painters to finish her work. There was, of course, a foundation of fact to this charge. Often her talented beginner's combination of awkwardness and facility intrigued or enraged the artists who frequented her penthouse salon, and one or another would sit himself before one of her canvases and before he was through he would have left the hallmarks of his own workmanship on it. But despite the help she got in the early days there was never anything in the allegation that it was only other people's talent, bought with Phelps' money, that made her famous as an artist. If anyone cared to dispute that fact, there was the instance during the second show which Knoedler's gave her, only six months after the first—the one to which *Life* magazine devoted four pages in color.

Of all the critics that Letia enraged, none was more irritated by his inability to say what he did not like about her paintings than one of the Profile writers on *The New Yorker* magazine. Art was not his field, but the sudden popularity of Letia Long Phelps made her, he felt, a legitimate target. In the biographical piece he did on her, he dismissed the hoopla over Letia's first show by suggesting that her work might be the forerunner of a new school of calendar art. The old school calendar picture, he noted, was a cheap dramatization of some familiar scene, usually dripping with sentiment, bold and literal enough to catch the eye and yet conservative enough to reassure it when it got there. For out-of-date sentiment, he

said, Letia substituted a more modern cynicism. Otherwise he saw no difference.

According to *The New Yorker's* man, Letia's scenes of women gambling at Reno, for which she had special photographs taken to get the detail, were cynical modern versions of "The Face on the Barroom Floor." Her mannequins at a fashion show, he felt, were exciting only to silly women who pined for a Long House creation.

*The New Yorker's* writer knew a picture which would be popular when he saw one, and he had also a deep conviction that what so many people would like could not possibly be art. So when his own prophecy of Letia's effectiveness proved sound, he took it as almost a personal affront. After oil paintings by Letia Long Phelps began appearing in department store windows and there were news stories in the papers about their sales—and for what ridiculous prices—he forgot that he himself had predicted no less. So he began to talk around town about the "influences" in her work, always quoting the word influences and contriving elsewhere in his remarks to suggest that the artist he named was a sly fellow who would do anything for money. He also discovered Orlando in Letia's past and held him personally responsible for all the publicity that Letia was getting.

When André Verner of Knoedler's opened his second Letia Long Phelps show, *The New Yorker's* self-appointed critic decided to concentrate on a single picture of Letia's and to destroy it for once and for all. Taking over the magazine's Art Department for the purpose—acting as Guest Critic—he chose a big canvas called *Dinner Party* to attack. It was a pretentious work which Letia had painted in a hurry to get it in the show on time; actually it was unfinished and the paint was still wet when it was hung. Its broad expanse included a dozen satirical portraits and a wealth of painstaking work at making the tablecloth glow with whiteness and the silver twinkle.

*Dinner Party* was striking because the candle-lit faces of the diners had in them some of the scorn that Letia had felt for the men and women she had known when she was Randolph Phelps' first wife. Yet that scorn was nowhere pure. One felt it tarnished with admiration, if not for the individuals, at least for the trappings. It was a court scene by a clever painter who believed in aristocracy even if he had his reser-

uations about the current crop of aristocrats. Moreover, the straining to get what feeling there was in the picture had distracted Letia from the drawing and the composition, and in the original version of the *Dinner Party*, she revealed her lack of maturity.

Letia had sensed this herself and had tried to make up for it by the Rockwell-like attention she paid to the details of the costumes and of the table. This made it even easier for *The New Yorker's* man to attack the picture and to call attention to the photographic quality in Letia's work. The nicest thing he said about the *Dinner Party* was that it seemed the work of a heartless child who saw grown-up doings accurately enough but had no understanding whatever of what they were or felt.

Letia's attitude toward all critics had always been personal. Their standards were not hers and she had in fact no notion of what any of them were driving at. In her opinion, critics were artists or writers who did not have the talent to make a good living either by painting or by writing. She could therefore only explain what seemed to her their personal animosity by concluding that like women—and there seemed something feminine about all of them—they were jealous of her. What one of them had ever made a picture that sold for \$500?

The art critics who first wrote seriously of the things she sold were the first group of individuals whom Letia really hated, individually and as a group. *The New Yorker* writer she could not abide, and yet it was the insistence of his criticism of *Dinner Party* that crushed forever the canard that Letia was a fake who hired others to do her work.

It was in the second mail on a Tuesday that the advance proof of the critique reached Letia. She had made an issue of it being sent her. She had to fight herself to read it through because after the first paragraph she was so angry that she could hardly focus her eyes on the type. Susan had been dressing her for a luncheon that Knoedler's Mr. Verner was giving her to meet a man from Cleveland who had bought several of her earlier pictures and who was probably on the verge of buying several more at the new prices Verner had set—\$1,000 for a medium-sized canvas. The costume that Susan had picked out for her was long for a luncheon dress and flowing, with a frilly feminine jabot about the throat. It was always Susan who decided what her costume should

be because Letia had lost interest in her own clothes soon after she had begun designing them for other women.

White with rage, and swirling chiffon, Letia had stomped through the halls of her apartment to her studio room and thrown paint in a box. She had gathered pallet and brushes in reckless disregard for their colors coming off on what she wore, had bundled herself and her armful into a taxicab and driven straight to the gallery where the still damp *Dinner Party* hung. It was the first week of the show but there were twenty or thirty lunchtime visitors in the room when she arrived. She elbowed them out of her path as she crossed the room to the big painting.

To the attendant who trotted after her Letia snapped, "Don't just stand there. Get me an easel—or a stool, or a chair, or anything to put these things down on." When he brought her the visitor's chair from Mr. Verner's own office, she opened her box of oil paints on it and, holding the pallet in her left hand, began furiously to squeeze an assortment of colors onto it. The trailing sleeve of her dress interfered for a second. Setting down the tube of colors she held in her other hand, she reached up and tore the sleeve away from her shoulder. She ripped it down to the cuff, then yanked this free. After that she put down the pallet itself and tore off the other sleeve.

Thus stripped for action, her bare arms flashing, Letia went to work on all the things with which *The New Yorker's* critic had taken issue in *Dinner Party*. With long scrapes of her pallet knife she cleared the table, sweeping silver and glass into a ball of dirty color which she picked off the knife with her free hand and splattered on Knoedler's newly waxed floor. Then, one by one, she stripped the guests themselves down to raw discolored canvas, looked a second at the faces, removed one of these and left the rest suspended in space without bodies or background. Then she began, with swift sure strokes, to build the picture up again.

Knoedler's astonished noontime patrons had drawn back to the far side of the room. There they clustered like sheep huddling before a storm. But not one of them left. They were hypnotized. Presently André Verner himself arrived. He had been waiting at the Marguery with his Western millionaire and had finally telephoned Letia's apartment to find out where she was.

By the time of his arrival, Letia's first fury had spent itself

and she was plowing her way through the new canvas she was creating. Her white-blonde hair had come down twice—she was wearing it then in a smooth knot at the nape of her neck—and now it was gathered straight on top of her head and tied round with a shred of chiffon from one of the desecrated sleeves of her dress. It stood straight up like a savage hair-do, smeared every color of the rainbow from the paint on her impatient hands.

Mr. Verner stopped at the doorway to his own gallery and knew enough not to come closer. Presently Letia's Susan passed by him en route to her mistress with fresh supplies of paints which had been telephoned for. Whole square feet of canvas had already been re-covered with paint.

By 3 o'clock it was all over. It had taken a little over two hours; before twenty witnesses, Letia had recreated her *Dinner Party* picture.

Critics may still debate whether the new *Dinner Party* is more intriguing than the old, which remains only in a few people's memory because it had never been photographed before it was destroyed. But after that instance, no one could deny Letia's facility with oil paints; whether it was art or no, it was her own.

Verner himself said at the time that although he had known a thousand artists, he had never met one with the inspired competence that Letia demonstrated that day. And of course the Knoedler people still sigh when they tell the story, because if Letia had gone on painting she would have made the gallery a lot more money than she did. As it was, in the space of a brief fourteen months, starting unknown as a painter, she had made a nationwide reputation.

As Letia Long, Letia had been known only to a handful of young men-about-town, the pupils of Orlando Hicks' academy, and the cast of the play in which she appeared briefly. When she was Letia Phelps, Letia's audience was enlarged to include what passed for Society and the considerably larger group that reads about it in the newspapers. As the proprietress of Long House, Letia held her old audience and added one section of the commercial world to it. But it was as Letia Long Phelps, the painter, that Letia made her first bow to the mass audiences of America, despite the fact that few of them were ever to see an original Letia Long Phelps painting

and only a handful would have seriously contemplated paying the prices that were asked for one.

No one can say definitely what tired Letia of painting. It was as if, when she had begun to paint, she had set apart a certain store of psychic energy to be expended on painting, and when that energy was used up, she simply desired to paint no more. It is too easy to say, as she herself used to comment, that she felt people were taking her too seriously and that that had begun to bore her. Her pose was always that she painted for fun and money only. It is too easy to say and not true.

Like most public figures, the more attention Letia got from the press, the more she came, consciously or unconsciously, to need and to take for granted. Moreover, the grudging admission of her competence that the critics eventually conceded never satisfied her.

Perhaps to find a clue to where the energy that made her paint came from, and where it went, one has to go back again to the waters of the Gulf Stream in which Letia floated, almost submerged, for so long.

Consciously, Letia never had fewer doubts about the course of action she followed. She was certain that when alone in the ocean, half drowned and suffering physically, and later, in the first moments of clarity in the still hospital room, she had learned a great lesson in the frailty of human beings and the tenuousness of their grasp on life itself. With this, she had also known naked fear and become conscious, for the first time, of her own total dependence on the body in which she lived.

For a while at sea, with only the *Miramar's* life preserver to keep her afloat, she had been unconscious, but most of the forty-nine hours had passed with her achingly aware of what was happening to her. For most of them, she was fighting hard for her life, and the only thing she could do about it was to try to keep her lungs clear and to move about to keep her blood circulating no matter how desperately another side of her wanted to give up and relax and die of the numbing cold. She felt her feet and her hands swell and she knew her strength was oozing from her like life blood from a wound. The pain that flooded her from the places where she had been badly bruised helped to keep her conscious, but again and again that same pain seemed unendurable.

The whole experience was a shock of fantastic proportions to her, for Letia had never before suffered physically or known the violence her physical needs could generate—her need for water, for instance; her need to stop hurting. These things floated on top, and in the foreground, of her total need for staying alive.

She had never before had any sense at all of her dependence as a human being on other human beings. There was nothing in her world now but the sea and she knew that it was slowly killing her and that she would die of it unless other human beings saved her.

Letia felt that she had learned these facts of life in the sea and that she had mastered them lying in the hospital, hot and uncomfortable from the damage that had been done to her.

Letia felt she was now certain, as a direct result of this knowledge, that her whole life up to this moment had been futile. She had got nothing for it. She had acquired no real values; she had no real self-sufficiency. It was very clear to her that she must begin again, and that nothing that she had accomplished to date or learned, except in the first days after the hurricane, had any value to her.

So it seemed to her to be elementary logic to dispose of her business and to start again from there. The move was so simple and logical to her that she was untroubled about what would come next. When she experienced no sense of conflict or confusion, as she slid into her new career as a painter, she was sure that she had confirmed her own conclusions.

It is not quite true that she wrote off all her previous experience as useless to her. She did consciously come to one other conclusion which was based on experiences which antedated The Great Fear. This had to do with men. Her thoughts about men had begun with thoughts about Solomon. Her thoughts about Solomon had been born in the waves of fury which swept her from time to time while she was immersed. It was Solomon who was responsible for her being where she was. Tears came to her eyes when she thought how she had been betrayed by his obeying her orders to take the *Miramar* ashore. That fool, that fool, that fool! He had cost himself his own life and he had brought her to this. She reminded herself that Solomon knew very well that she did not know what she was talking about, that she knew nothing of hurricanes, when she had ordered him to his death. She blamed him

unequivocally for everything that followed. She even held him responsible for having subjected her to the shock of seeing him die. That was his ultimate nastiness. Her only satisfaction was that he was dead.

Then, from her experience with Solomon, she concluded that all the men she had known had been like that, that they had been inadequate and had failed her. Joe, whom she had loved, had failed her. He had been another Solomon. And again tears came to her eyes, thinking of how she had loved him and how inadequate he had been.

Randy in his own weak way had failed her, too. If he had been a man, he would have made her life full once she had become his wife. If he had been a man, he would not have let her play such a silly trick on him; he would not have left her for that overblown bitch, Rosalie.

And these were the three men who had meant the most in her life, with whom she had been most involved! She would have no more of men, men as intimates, as important parts of her life. Men as lovers, possibly—she thought this later, in the hospital. Men as lovers might be beaten as she had beaten Solomon, if she needed them, but they should never again be allowed to maneuver her into a position where her existence was dependent on their character and judgment. Men were still to be used, if she ever looked like a human being again and the swelling of her wrists and ankles went down and her skin stopped flaming; men were still to be used, but were never again to use her.

All these thoughts were Letia's own explanation to herself of why she liquidated her life as a business woman and started anew. She was sure her diagnosis was correct because, for the first time she could remember, she felt relaxed and free in her painting. She was without any sense of strain.

The color came quickly back to her cheeks and she felt vibrantly alive. It was the first time she found she could get angry, as she did so often at the critics, without feeling deeply disturbed or murderous. She could also laugh and be gay, as she often was with the painters who hung about her studio and the reporters who came often and stayed too long because Letia always had whisky for them and was good copy. She adjusted herself well to her dependence on reporters for the publicity of which, each year, she needed more.

A very different cause-and-effect sequence could also ac-

count for Letia's new sense of well-being. She had liquidated two cycles of success and begun a third. Each time she began a new line of endeavor, she threw herself whole-heartedly into it, overcame the obstacles in her path almost effortlessly, only each time to find her own reasons for liquidating her success and starting over again. By this reasoning, it could have been correctly predicted that Letia would not long remain a painter, that, in fact, the quicker she was successful, the sooner she would find her success psychologically worthless. Already the repeating pattern was becoming clear.

A deep anxiety to destroy herself had so nearly succeeded in Florida that the experience had, for the time being, set her free of it. She had contrived to place herself in the path of a hurricane to get herself blown out to sea with only a life preserver to keep her alive until she was found.

Her unconscious need to destroy herself being temporarily appeased, Letia's equally extraordinary will and determination to live was now set free without opposition. So freed, Letia was creative as never before. Creating the pictures she painted, she now also had an outlet, which she continuously opened wider, through which to drain away the aggressive impulses of her essentially violent nature. Thus her career as a painter did not end in her damming up the impulses of her life until they exploded in violence, as they had after she had beaten and disciplined herself into success as a couturiere. Instead, they led her naturally from one creative activity into another, as when she turned from painting to the book she wrote, and finally, they made it possible for her to fall in love again, something that was for a long time beyond her own power even to imagine herself doing.

By 1938, when Letia was still only just thirty, she was the most widely known painter in America, a position of eminence which she had achieved, despite what her detractors said, in two years without direct benefit of the money she had accumulated. No one who knew her doubted, then, that when she wrote a book it would be a book most literate Americans would hear of. The book that Letia wrote in six weeks, with the assistance of four secretaries, pacing up and down her drawing room as they came and went in relays, was about a very rich man who loved his horses more than his wife. Just as the critics, even *The New Yorker's* critic, could never quite

explain away her paintings as popular claptrap because, in each of them, she had really had something to say and had tried to say it, so the success of *Horse and Husband* could never be explained away by the furor of speculation over whether Randolph Phelps was or wasn't the husband described.

Gannett of the *New York Herald Tribune* was only partially correct when he wrote that *Horse and Husband* was successful because every frustrated wife in America would want to read it: that all American wives resented their husband's interest in something other than themselves, and that they would be grateful because Letia had put their feelings in words of one syllable and in a way that made them the heroines.

There were other qualities in the book which made it at once as universal and as controversial as the best of the pictures Letia had painted, as the most desirable of the dresses she had designed. It had The Touch. At heart, it was Letia's return to set her soul at peace on how she felt about men, after the intensities of her first feelings after the hurricane had been eased. It was not a characterization of Phelps—she used more of what she had learned about rich men and their wives as a couturiere than of what she had learned as a rich man's wife herself. But it was a very fine and satisfying expression of the case of the unsatisfied woman against the unsatisfying man. And it sold and sold.

With the success of the book, and the things it let out of Letia in writing it, she blossomed anew. Everything was now right in her world. It had been a long time since she had worried about money. Even as a painter she had eventually made more each month than she could spend and Falkenstall shook his head in awe as he invested the compounding return on her accumulated wealth and watched the figures mount.

The settlement which had come to her from Phelps had been invested in the early Thirties when securities were at their lowest. Even conservatively managed, her Phelps capital had almost doubled.

The forethoughtful deal that she had made with the syndicate that bought Long House was now beginning to pay off in continuously mounting percentages. She had picked the purchasers of Long House well, for most of the best specialty and department stores in America had Long House salons now, and sold the lines she had created exclusively.

Even the most successful portrait artists in America had moments when they bit their paint brushes in rage at the ease with which Knoedler's sold Letia's pictures for larger and larger sums.

And now, with the first book she had written reviewed on the first page of the *Tribune* Book Section, and the publisher's taking full-page ads to boast of the trade sales—and of the book's selection by the Literary Guild—it was clear that Letia had created yet another property that would be worth a small fortune in its own right. It was inevitable that *Horse and Husband* would be a moving picture.

In addition to Susan and the couple that kept house for her, two new secretaries now spent their working days with Letia. One was exclusively concerned with keeping abreast of Letia's press clippings. The other kept track of Letia's engagements and referred all requests for interviews and pictures to the public relations office that Hicks had set up just to handle Letia and Long House. Graciously, Letia let Long House, Inc.'s fee pay the expense of Hicks' establishment. Since Orlando also had the Long House advertising, he himself did not do badly.

Of private life, Letia had none—nor felt the want of it. Her life was full of all kinds of men, a great many of whom either wished to marry her or were curious about what she would be like in bed or wished to gain something from being so close to someone who had so much money and was so well known and who knew so many people and who was so genuinely effective. But Letia experienced no desire to be intimate with any of them. The insistence of their desire for more of her became simply another satisfying element in the satisfying medium in which she moved, a medium in which she had no desires which were not immediately fulfilled, whether these desires were for a cup of tea, the undivided attention of anyone who caught her fancy, or a new success. She existed in a medium of fulfillment and the days passed in continually satisfying if uneventful activity.

It was in a mood of exploiting the lavishness of her success that Letia agreed, in the spring of 1939, to go to Hollywood where they were beginning the picture that would be made of *Horse and Husband*. The movie rights had been sold to Goldwyn for a modest \$300,000, with a two per cent interest in the gross over two million. Hollywood was one world with

which Letia had had little contact, although at Long House she had dressed several stars. It was a new world to conquer, this time to satisfy no compulsion to succeed but simply and happily for the fun of it. It even passed through Letia's mind that it might be amusing to become a movie star herself. The columnists had gossiped about the possibility of her playing the lead in her own picture. Or perhaps it would be more fun to produce and direct the *Horse and Husband* picture, to make the puppets of her own creation dance. She, who had exploited so many situations without consciously thinking of herself as exploiting them at all, was now at last aware that the world was hers to exploit, to turn to whatever would make life most pleasing.

Letia took Susan and one of the secretaries with her to Hollywood. A very large party of friends, admirers, and people who made their living because of Letia's talents saw them all off from Newark Airport.

*Sturges Discovers the Flesh*

AFTER STURGES STRONG's liberation—his first day of willful catering to his own moods—he went back to work at *Facts* almost as hard as ever; but it was never quite the same. He did not go back to the Racquet Club again for a long time. Like the man who made a hole-in-one the first time on the course, Sturges doubted, perhaps, whether he could live up to himself there. There really must be more to being a good fellow, he thought, than he had learned so easily. Besides, unless the occasion were one in which he could hold forth as an authority, he was naturally shy.

Sturges did, however, return to Miss Swift's institution and was presently to become one of her most valued patrons. Swift's was just the place, he felt, for him to learn to live again and to become accustomed, secretly, to his new sense of importance. It catered to the elders of the best clubs in town, and Sturges felt that in going there he was doing something that was sophisticated, and almost important, as well as gratifyingly naughty. Everyone was extremely discreet and respectful at Swift's; the service was on a par with the service that its clients got in their own clubs.

Even the girls themselves at Miss Swift's had been taught to be subdued and respectful. For a long time Sturges was frightened of them, but gradually he became used to the fact that they were his property because of the money he paid Miss Swift for their time—and he had lots of money. He could have gone to Miss Swift's twice a day and every day and not worried a bit about the expense!

One day Sturges lay on the high, narrow rubbing table that Miss Swift's provided for its visitors and they brought a young girl in to him. He had first undressed and been skillfully beaten on by one of the big German women, and she had gathered up her talcum powder and her rubbing alcohol and gone away, leaving him tingling, warm and alive and expectant.

That was the way it always was: first he waited in the dim living room on the second floor, then there came a rustle of

starched skirts and a nurse in a white uniform appeared and said, "This way, please." Following her up a flight of carpeted stairs, he would pause when she paused, by one of the closed doors. She always knocked and waited to be sure there was no mistake and that the room to which she was escorting him was empty. Then he would go in and the nurse would leave him there, closing the door softly after her. The nurse who showed him the way never spoke to him unnecessarily and he never spoke to her at all. Inside the room, he would always smile a little at the absurdity of all the equipment for exercising, and note that it was dusty and probably in too poor repair for use. But it also comforted him to see such obvious evidence of a discretion which was as much in his interest as in the proprietor's. If the police should ever come, he would have witnesses that his purpose was legitimate physical therapy. Miss Swift herself always spoke of "arranging for a treatment" when one telephoned for an appointment.

Sturges' heart would be beating faster now, as he hung his clothes neatly on the hatrack-like affair behind the screen in the corner. He always tried to undress slowly so that he would not have too long to wait, lying on the hospital-like contraption, with its thin, hard mattress and its single small hard pillow.

He always *did* have to wait, no matter how he dawdled, because the masseuse always took her time about arriving. When she came in at last, she was all brisk and businesslike, and also in a nurse's uniform. She went right to work, silently, impersonally, taking him apart, muscle by muscle, and putting him together again, finishing her work first with a slapping on of cool alcohol and then drying him with a warm towel. The big, brawny masseuse was always reassuringly delicate, carefully covering his nakedness wherever she was not at work. She was very considerate of his modesty.

Then after she had gone, Sturges would have another little time of waiting. This one would be different from the first. He would be feeling wonderful this time and very much alive. Sometimes the massage would have put him almost to sleep and he would be dreaming warm and private dreams. Fulfillment would be near, and was certain.

The end of the second little wait would come quickly. He would hear the last of the quick steps of someone approaching the door to where he lay, then the scraping of door handle

as it turned to open the latch, followed almost immediately by the decisive click of the latch itself closing behind whoever had come into the room—he could not see at once who it was because there was always a second screen in front of the door itself. After the click, the girl appeared as suddenly as if conjured up, by his side, standing over him, in her uniform which was as starched and white as the others’.

She might be a blonde or a brunette or a girl with red hair. Each week the cast at Swift’s changed and Sturges never stated preferences. But whatever the color of her hair, she would be as well trained as the masseuse before her, only she would weigh a great deal less.

The blonde or brunette or redhead would smile down at Sturges a moment and then she would slip off her starched thing, unfastening only a button or two.

The first woman, the masseuse, always came to Sturges alone; the second was usually alone, but sometimes, because Sturges was an important client, Miss Swift herself came with the young lady who was to give the final treatment. Despite the flattery of her attention, Sturges was always annoyed until she went away. Miss Swift came to ask if he was comfortable and to introduce the blonde or brunette or redhead. “This is your new operator, Miss So-and-So”—always the last name.

Miss Swift’s smile was friendly and almost bashful and never insinuating like the smile of a common Madame. She knew how to cater to the very best people and her money was supposed to go to support a nephew who played polo with some of her clients. After her introduction, Miss Swift would slip away, so silently that Sturges could not hear her go any more than he had heard her approach. Miss Swift’s step was lighter than the step of the slightest of the girls themselves.

The day on which Miss Swift brought the young girl was no different to Sturges than any other day he’d been there. Nor did the girl herself at first appear to be any different, in the dim light, in her starched uniform. Only, after Miss Swift left, she did not come to stand over him and smile down at him, but stood some feet away, having difficulty with a button-hole. When she was ready at last, and he lay looking at her, he saw that she was really a lovely thing, with a fresh, slim young body, hardly mature. Her sandy bobbed hair framed a young and gentle face. She had large soft eyes which were shy.

Sturges felt her at once and strongly, while she was still standing across the room from him. He also felt his own head swim a little and he knew he was naked. He sat up, awkwardly, and she smiled a shy smile at him. She came forward, her movement as awkward as his had been, and stretched out her hand. She stroked his head, softly, as if with affection.

Sturges would not have had her at all if she had made a single gesture of repulse. He would have apologized sincerely for being there at all. But the young girl did not repulse him. She fondled his hair and stroked his neck and he responded and for a while they seemed like lovers—Sturges like a lover, too, as well as the girl, dreamily, half way between reality and acting a part. And presently the young girl was as passionate as any lover, and Sturges, too. They were both young and strong and had been attracted to each other. And then, right afterwards, immediately afterwards, the young girl's eyes filled with tears and these ran silently down either cheek.

To Sturges, the young girl looked very beautiful and perhaps she was. A great wave of emotion swept him and for a few seconds he was in love with her and looked and looked into her eyes and did not know how hard his breath was coming.

She did not say a word. She had said nothing since she had come into the room. She left with dignity, smiling again, gently, not wiping the tears which still clung to her face.

Sturges wanted desperately to talk to her but was not able. For some time he was shaken by the experience and even tried to find out from Miss Swift who the girl was but Miss Swift would not say. Miss Swift discouraged personal relationships between staff and clientele. Once or twice that week Sturges drove out of his way to pass through the street on which Miss Swift's was, hoping to catch a glimpse of the girl, but he never saw her again and none of his other visits to the establishment where he had met her were emotionally eventful.

The episode, however, was the nearest Sturges had come to falling in love since Joan.

Perhaps it was what he had felt that day that emboldened Sturges to try his luck in faster waters. At the little restaurant around the corner from the Racquet Club, he fell presently in conversation with a young lady who he was sure was a Powers model. She was not. She was just a pretty girl who had come to New York because she wanted to get in radio. But she had

a room in the building next door to the restaurant, her name was Toni, and Sturges found himself spending a lot of time with her.

Toni was impressed with Sturges, publishers being almost as glamorous to her as radio executives, and she was quite happy to let him talk to her. In time, however, it annoyed her to be told that when she called Sturges at the office, she should not give her correct name, which was Miss Conrad, but should tell Sturges' secretary that she was a mythical Mrs. Lyman. She could never understand the need for this and presently moved on to more entertaining companions.

Sturges did not mind much. He got to know several other Toni Conrads—one of the later ones even was a Powers model. He did, however, always require them to give pseudonyms when they called him at the office and he usually met them at places where, amongst his acquaintances, only the gayer of the Racquet Club members might see him. Sturges was under the mistaken impression that there was a fellowship in vice, so that other married members of the Racquet Club would no more think of telling on him than he on them. He reminded himself that it was no use blinking the fact that it was vice he was pursuing.

Sturges' indiscreet public meetings remained unnoticed however, not because the Club gossips had reformed but simply because even the jolly fellows with whom he had spent that first evening had long since forgotten him. At the time, Sturges Strong seemed doomed to permanent personal anonymity. Despite its new policy of publishing signed articles, including Sturges' own, *Facts* was still best known for anonymous news coverage. Here, *Facts* continued in the fashion of group journalism which keeps its contributors as anonymous as possible so that any fame that is earned accrues not to the individual but to the parent publication. For this reason, few outside the magazine field had heard of Sturges Strong in 1938.

Moreover, nine years of the grimmest kind of concentration, most of them in *Facts'* badly lighted original offices in the 30th Street loft, had prematurely aged Sturges. They had left a worried frown on his face which had made it almost undistinguishable from the faces of a million other worried and prematurely aging young men in New York. You had to know who Sturges was before you would be interested in looking a second time at him, and then you would be inter-

ested only because his face gave so few clues to how he had managed to be so uniquely successful at thirty.

Later on, as the frown was to relax a little and Sturges was to take on flesh so that he acquired rather formidable hanging jowls, and his hair had receded so that the impressive shape of his forehead was evident—and after everyone knew who he was and had seen his face in photographs a hundred times—it was agreed that he was a distinguished-looking man. But in the early days, his heavy frown and the squint around his eyes from interminable hours of reading and scratching with a pencil were almost like a mask, and he was puffy and pale from little sunlight.

All the same, Sturges' progress as a surreptitious rake was only an outward and visible (to a few) manifestation of an inner and invisible change that took place steadily in him the first year he knew he was rich. One of the ways in which he knew he was rich was to continue to remind himself of it. When he was alone, he often said a kind of catechism to himself, beginning with "I believe in the earning capacity of *Facts*," and proceeding to the arrangement and rearrangement of the figures concerning its net worth and earning capacity into various patterns which showed him, first one way and then another, how plentiful were the rewards of his labor.

After these figures had really begun to sink in, Sturges began, at first cautiously and then with greater and greater assurance, further to alter the surface structure of his life. Late in 1937, his more optimistic executives had secured an option on a big office building on Park Avenue just north of the Grand Central. The following summer, Sturges agreed to take up the option, and in the fall of '38 *Facts* moved into its present stately quarters.

Sturges was at first appalled by the space the architect had set aside for his own office, but it was not difficult to persuade him that it was a necessity for the conferences he still held. By the time the move was made, Sturges had consented to have his office paneled and to have a private toilet added so that he would not have to wander through the big bullpens where his employees worked. Here the architect temporarily overestimated his man, for Sturges was still too shy to use the facilities he provided. When people on his staff came to look for him, it gave him a distinct feeling of nervousness to hear them coming and going while he was locked away so near.

Sturges' working relations with all his staff, however, were still extremely close. It was not a pose that the door to his office was always open then; the people who worked for him were expected to take every problem to the boss. Every man and woman who worked on *Facts* knew that his or her security was directly dependent on pleasing Sturges. Facts, Inc., was still a one-man company, and when Sturges frowned, the whole office was depressed.

Even McNulty and his new man Joe Rogers knew that the duration of their independence was itself dependent on their giving Sturges at least the illusion that he was a party to every decision they made. In the organization of the company, every department head had the right of direct access to the boss, and every department head knew that his employees had that right, too, and could appeal to Sturges over his head without fear. If there were times when Sturges' decisions still seemed arbitrary to his people, there was, in those days at Facts, Inc., a real working democracy in which every man and even favored women could cast a vote.

Thus Circulation Manager Schulberg and Advertising Manager Brennan had no hesitation at all in coming to Sturges with their first ideas for *Fantasy*, just as McNulty had come with his first thoughts for a new policy for *Facts*. Schulberg and Brennan were the most ambitious of Strong's original lieutenants. Fairstreet, who had kept his hold on his job as Strong's chief of staff, was ambitious, too, but he was by nature a toady and he had succeeded only because he was such a good one. Brennan and Schulberg were both aggressive men. They had always felt that the editorial side of the organization had run away with *Facts*, and were cross that editors still dominated its policy. Schulberg and Brennan felt that they could have made more money quicker than McNulty with his highbrow ideas. Now they were inspired by the first flash of success of *Life* and had decided between them that the time had come for them to take on Luce himself. As a money-maker, even *Facts* was too slow for them.

The basic idea for *Fantasy* was that *Life* was too serious-minded. It had Lucian pretensions. It tried to educate. Their idea was for an escape medium to end all escape mediums. From *Life*, they would frankly steal what seemed to them most fun. They would cover crime and sex in photographs. They would take a frivolous attitude toward public affairs. Thus far

it was Myron Brennan's idea. Then Schulberg added the brilliant notion of introducing comics into the slick magazine field. As the master of comics, *Fantasy* would be a Pied Piper which would lead untold millions to the news stands to buy a magazine twice a week instead of a newspaper every day. Not even the big women's magazines, which counted on serials to keep their renewal rates up, could compete with the renewal rates which would result from an audience that was loyal to the characters in the most popular comic strips. These were the serial stories which went on and on forever.

So semi-weekly *Fantasy* was seen whole in the imaginations, experience and judgments of Strong's two lieutenants, before even the first dummy was made—a year before *Facts'* new creation made its bow to the public. It was seen whole almost exactly as it finally appeared, and almost exactly as it is today with its 20,000,000 circulation. Schulberg and Brennan were able to describe it in detail the very first time they brought it up. It is hard to say why Sturges, who had exactly the same publishing background that his executives had, failed to see its commercial possibilities and did his best to discourage his associates from publishing it.

It was even harder for them to understand why, feeling as he did, Sturges did not make it impossible for them to proceed at all. Actually he let his associates go ahead for several reasons. He liked them, he respected them, his organization was dependent on them as executives; and for these reasons, he did not want to cross them too abruptly. Moreover, he felt that *Facts, Inc.*, could now afford a few thousand dollars to experiment. But, mostly, Sturges let them go ahead, as 1938 drew to a close, for no better reason than that he was finding himself in an increasingly benign mood.

It is, however, a small ironic footnote in his true biography that Sturges Strong never made a formal decision to start what proved to be far and away his most profitable enterprise, but simply allowed it to happen by never getting around to putting his foot down until his enthusiastic associates had gone so far in the matter of contracting for paper and printing, and had spent so much money arranging to break into the picture field and to monopolize the magazine rights to comic artists' work, that it appeared as if it would be cheaper for *Facts, Inc.*, to go ahead with a modest *Fantasy* than to write off the investment.

It was in October of 1938 that Brennan and Schulberg proposed publishing their new magazine. Strong's first reaction was to say, "No-o-o—but if you want to kick it around a little more, we can afford a few dollars." Through the ensuing months, the conspirators proceeded to set up a small experimental department in some spare offices, high up in the building where *Facts* made its home. Telling the proprietors of the newspaper syndicates that they were playing with the notion of putting a picture and comic supplement in *Facts*, they allowed themselves to be taken by signing contracts to purchase the slick magazine rights to many of the newspaper publishers' most valuable properties. They "allowed themselves to be taken" because they committed themselves to paying \$2,000 for what then seemed worth no more than a thousand. The managers of the newspaper syndicates presumed that they were selling their strips to be used as occasional features in serious-minded *Facts*. They went away chuckling, unaware that their properties were to lay the foundation for a magazine that could soon afford to pay them twenty times what they had gotten.

And so it would eventually be with *Fantasy*, even though in the meantime the undertaking would almost bankrupt its proprietors. Until the announcements to the trade had all been printed, however, Sturges Strong had every right not to worry about the possibility of going broke, because he was so sure he could tell Schulberg and Brennan to stop playing and put their toys back in the box anytime.

In the warm atmosphere of his assumed security, Sturges continued to blossom. He even began to be thoughtful of Mary. He had never really felt guilty about sleeping with other women; except for the girl at Swift's, his contacts had been without emotion. He was proud of the orthodoxy of his behavior, proud that he was doing what the best people among his acquaintances in the Club were doing. He was doing it, he thought, rather better than most—and more discreetly. No one who counted knew he was doing it at all.

But Mary and the children, and he himself, had now to be moved, he concluded, into more appropriate surroundings. Again it was Falkenstall, who was always solicitous about such things, who put the idea in his head, suggesting that the time had come to repurchase the Van Voort estate in Greenwich. Instead, Sturges decided that he would build his own mansion.

By this time, Sturges was well beyond his dull and uneventful Fridays with the family, but he still felt a little guilty when he stayed away too often. The project of the new house now let him fill his legal days off with purpose. It was easy for the first real estate salesman who caught him—he was a big-enough fish for a senior vice-president of Pease & Elliman—to sell him a thousand acres just far enough back from the new Merritt Highway, beyond Port Chester.

Like the first thoughts of *Fantasy*, that was in October of 1938. Through the following winter, there was the business which began as a chore in appropriateness, and ended in being fun, of planning the creation of An Estate.

The land that had been sold Sturges was solid enough, but he had agreed to it because of its commanding view—and, where the view was, there was neither water nor shade. When the frost began to go out of the ground in March, a small army of workmen, led by half a dozen valiant contractors, stormed Mt. Strong and began a furious digging of wells, moving in of giant trees, laying of foundations, and terracing of hillsides for formal gardens and orchards.

The young ladies whom Sturges had met in Manhattan's side streets were much more considerate of, if less realistic about, Sturges' resources than the architects and builders who now entered his life. Falkenstall's own place was only a few minutes' drive from where Sturges began building. Falkenstall took over the unofficial duties of owner's representative so that, when Sturges came up almost every week, there was always plenty of accomplishment for him to admire.

The whole building world was new to Strong; the scale of his operations was equally unfamiliar. It never occurred to him that he had begun the creation of an institution which would take twenty servants to man and which would one day stand in the books at a little over \$2,000,000. It was to be a Tudor manor house, complete with stables, swimming pools—three in all, one for the children, one for the servants, and one for himself and his guests—an indoor tennis court, and, of course, its own dairy farm.

To Mary, that spring, all this was completely a dream. After years of being a selfless slave to her husband and her children, she was suddenly a princess who had survived a revolution and was about to return to the palace in which she grew up or, even better, to a bigger and more beautiful

palace, constructed especially for her. She could not comprehend it at all, and even though the thoughtful architect had framed his sketch of the house-to-be and sent it to her—and it now hung in their living room in East 71st Street—and even though each week she saw with her own eyes the hundreds of artisans laying brick, connecting pipe, framing roofs, and torturing the land for her, she could not accept these things as realities. She even tried to persuade Sturges to let her go on running their apartment as she had, with only her aging female house worker.

In this ambition, Mary was undone by another of her husband's handimen. It was Fairstreet who picked up a chance remark of Sturges' on the difficulty of getting servants and who personally procured a cook and butler and a house maid, each of whom was willing to sleep out while they cared for the Strongs in their modest apartment, pending the completion of the manor house.

Mary would not move either to another apartment or to a hotel, though presently there were times when she was tempted to because she found it very difficult to manage things with so many servants under foot. It was not at all the way it had been when she was a girl and the servants were her father's and altogether part of the scheme of things. Now they were too-respectful foreigners—the cook and the maid were French and the butler was an Englishman—and she could not get used to them. Moreover, Mary continued to have an unreasonable sense of extravagance, thinking of the wages that were paid from Sturges' office.

Unlike his wife, Sturges had felt the reality of the Port Chester place from the very moment he discussed the possibilities of the site with the vice-president of Pease & Elliman. He was used to translating plans into realities. But at home he shared with Mary the same sense of hesitation before taking the plunge. Psychologically, he clung for a little while to the surroundings that were so familiar, if really so meaningless, to him. But, once more unlike Mary, he was under no illusion about what he was doing in still living in 71st Street. He knew he was only pretending that he was still a modest man, a man with his way in the world to make.

Finally Sturges grew tired of that feeling and decided that he was called upon to shake it off. He decided that he would shake off the feeling of being no more than a hard-working

executive—he was still that, for all his distractions—and he would also make himself free of some other things. He would make himself free of some of the duller and less important responsibilities he still carried, such as the purchasing of paper and ink and the reviewing of the accomplishments of his advertising salesmen, and he would also shake himself off from the self-imposed burden of his semi-annual article for his magazine.

It was to accomplish all these ends that Sturges decided on his trip to California. It would not be just any old trip to California. It would be a trip to California in a plane which he would charter for himself, for the purpose of visiting his fellow mogul, William Randolph Hearst. Since he did not know Mr. Hearst, had never met him, and was undoubtedly not considered by the old man to be a fellow mogul at all, such a visit required a purpose, and the purpose was at hand and fitted in very nicely. Sturges would visit Hearst to do one last article for *Facts*, to set one final ornament on the brow of his literary achievements. He would do an article on Mr. Hearst's fortune, which would not only give his trip an objective but which would also be interesting in itself. He could compare his own fortune with the fortune of the subject, and that would be amusing.

It *was* a unique idea—for a millionaire to interview another millionaire on the subject of his millions! It appealed to the journalist in Sturges. As a journalist, the story also had its challenging side. The Hearst fortunes were notoriously difficult to unscramble. No magazine, he felt, had done an adequate job. Sturges would prove that as a Fact-Finder, himself, he had no peer.

Thus it was with a high sense of adventure that Sturges took off from Newark Airport, in a chartered Lockheed with two pilots, now his personal chauffeurs, and set out for the West. It was a day that was comparable in importance to him with that first day, almost a year before, when, instead of spending his day of leisure with his wife and children, he had first exercised his free will and done something on his own initiative for purposes of his own. The importance of that first day, he saw, had been largely symbolic; but now he had grown used to his sense of independence, security, and wealth. He was doing something more than just making a gesture. He was carrying out a whole line of independent conduct,

simply because he wished to, simply because what he was doing suited his needs.

He felt marvelous. The old man of San Simeon would be no match for him. He, who had just given the most hesitant approval to his own organization's experimenting with a single new magazine, was now riding high over the Alleghenies, wondering to himself how long it would take him to outdistance Hearst with his twenty-eight newspapers and thirteen magazines. There was no objective to which he, Sturges Strong, could not aspire.

Sturges sat in the last seat in the empty plane. The door to the cockpit was closed. He was alone. He stretched out his legs, across the aisle, and propped them on the rear of one of the passenger seats opposite. He put his hands behind his head and leaned well back, and his eyes were half closed in an expression that was almost ecstatic and he began to sing to himself.

The song which Sturges chose without much imagination was "California, Here I Come!"

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### *Emperor Meets Empress*

THE AIRPORT AT Albuquerque, New Mexico, is situated a few miles to the west of the town. Since the valley is very flat and very wide here, the airport is hardly more than so much reserved desert marked off by the runway lights, and it doesn't matter much if a pilot overshoots by a few feet or a few miles. On the floor of the desert itself, his landing would simply be a little bumpier, or so it seems from the air, circling to land.

Coming back from California, Sturges Strong was comforted by this fact after his pilot's second unsuccessful pass at east-west runway. On the ground, the wind was blowing a gusty, uneven forty miles an hour, and the lightly loaded Lockheed Hudson seemed to balloon up into the air each time its crew throttled down to drop the last few feet. After the flight from Los Angeles, the tanks were almost empty and its lone passenger weighed considerably less than a stabilizing load. The round, red sun was just disappearing into the horizon but the wind continued fitful. There was weather around.

On the third pass, the Lockheed made it, coming in hot. Long plumes of dust raced in its wake and made a pretty sight, catching the last rays of the sun. As befits an important private charter, the aircraft swirled to its final stop in front of the adobe passenger depot, chancing a ground loop and possible collision with the commercial liner which had landed half an hour earlier. The commercial liner's passengers, who had also come in from Los Angeles, were impressed.

Sturges did not hasten to disembark. The flight east over the mountains had been the most satisfying leg of his whole journey and his mood was of dreamy well-being.

The true grandeur of the scenery had been a proper backdrop for the thoughts that Sturges had been thinking, the thoughts of how satisfying his life was, of how successful his mission had been, and of how well he had contrived everything. In California, Sturges had had to overcome just enough obstacles, in arranging formally to interview William Ran-

dolph Hearst, to make the accomplishment of the interview worth while.

He had not found Hearst at San Simeon but at Wyntoon, in northern California. He had been met by his host's secretary, and seated that evening at Mr. Hearst's right. He had spent three long deliciously satisfying days talking with the great man himself by the swimming pool, playing tennis with him, watching him run the affairs of his empire. Throughout his stay, Sturges experienced a sense of deepening gratification.

When it was over, for tangible results, he had a briefcase full of notes. For intangible rewards, he had the respect that Hearst had paid him, and the fear of his power that the mighty man's associates had revealed.

Wyntoon is much more beautiful than better-publicized San Simeon. Its central establishment is a little village picked up from the mountains of Bavaria and transported intact to a valley of tall redwoods, through which runs a clear mountain stream. Two other villages of mountain chalets close by along the stream serve the main village which is built around a charming green with an ancient well in the center of it. Here Hearst and Strong spent most of their hours together, seated on incongruously modern lawn furniture, their conversation interrupted only when Hearst had business to transact. Hearst's business problems were always presented to him by one of his secretaries, the questions for him to answer neatly typed in language almost as curt as a headline's. There would be a dozen or more propositions to each sheet, and these Hearst would dispose of, his cold eyes hardening as he concentrated, sometimes dictating the answer in quick, short sentences, sometimes taking a pencil and scratching "yes," or "no," or some short sentence of instructions opposite each item. Between these moments of concentration, he was, to Sturges, grace itself.

All in all, Sturges had the rare and happy experience of meeting an idol whose feet did not turn out to be of clay. He also met an idol who was some years past the furious vigor of his prime and so awakened, in the younger man, no sense of personal rivalry. Sturges' thoughtful conclusion was that anything Hearst could do, he could do better.

His thoughts did not materialize into concrete plans for action but were, rather, part of the daydream of well-being that cradled him as firmly as the chartered plane in which he

flew, returning to the source of all good things in his life, his own young and rich and ambitious organization, Facts, Incorporated.

As an expression of his mood, Sturges had given meticulous instructions to his pilot to see that there was a bottle of chilled champagne on the plane. He had opened and poured it for himself after he had eaten and the co-pilot had come back and told him that they would be in Albuquerque in half an hour. The pilot had warned him that they might have to wait there a few hours. A summer thunderhead was moving slowly across the path of their flight, just east of Albuquerque.

After Sturges had drunk most of the bottle, he was so impressed by the wonder of the setting sun that he dropped to his knees by the window next to his seat to give himself an even better view of the spectacle. The whole top surface of the cumulus cloud bank was a sea of rosy flame.

The evening ritual of his childhood came back to him. It was a time to pray. He smiled tolerantly at his own fantasy that he was a child again. This time there was no doubt whatever of God's mood. The sun out there was the symbol of it, benign with vitality. God was all goodness and he himself was indistinguishable from God in his own sense of vital strength. Tears came to his eyes and he said aloud, "Oh, God, I thank You for being me." Then the words sounded silly to him and he felt foolish and abashed but still pleased with himself and with God. Guiltily, he sat back from the window, rocked onto his heels, and glanced nervously about the plane. Its passenger compartment was still empty but for him.

This little ceremony had happened only a few minutes before the pilots had flicked on the "Fasten Your Safety Belts" light, to tell Sturges that they were about to come down. It explains why it was not until they had been on the ground for several minutes, and the pilots themselves had climbed out and gone on to the control tower, that Sturges himself descended, only to meet the chief pilot returning.

The chief pilot said to him, "I'm sorry, Mr. Strong, but I think we ought to stand by here for a few hours. TWA's grounded the ship that came in ahead of us. We could clear on our own authority, but I think it would be taking a chance, sir."

"What a nuisance," said Sturges. He had no real anxiety

to be back in New York, but already he missed the motion of the plane, the sense of being on his way.

"I'll keep checked in with TWA," said the pilot apologetically. "Can I get anything for you, sir?"

The light was going rapidly from the sky and now the revolving beacon above the airport control tower flashed a brilliant green. After the green beam passed, there was a second of almost complete darkness, then the white beacon came around and lit briefly the spot where Sturges and the respectful pilot stood.

"I'll be all right," said Sturges. "I'll just walk around here for a while."

The pilot shuffled his feet nervously. He had one other thing to say which his proprietor might not like. A pilot never can tell about people who are important enough to charter a plane.

"The storm may stick, sir," he said. "If it does, I've made arrangements with TWA to put you up at a hotel in Albuquerque, sir—with their passengers, sir—just in case we have to wait until morning."

The pilot's apprehensions were sound. Mr. Strong was visibly irritated.

"Damn it," he said. "What's the use of having your own plane if you're grounded just like everybody else?"

"Yes, sir. I know, sir," said the pilot and slipped tactfully away into the semi-darkness to be sure to give his passenger no chance to make an issue of going on.

Sturges' grumble was insincere only because he had no good reason for haste. His irritation at having his smooth passage interrupted by so trivial a thing as a thunderstorm in his path was quite real. He was in no mood to resign himself to obstacles. He swung an impatient toe at the desert. It collided smoothly with a pebble about the size of a big marble. As a result of the collision, the pebble arched into the air and a quick ear could have heard its path interrupted a few feet from where Sturges stood. The green light came and went, there was a second of darkness, and then the white beacon circling over Sturges' shoulder caught and photographed for him the object the pebble had struck. It was a girl of medium height with very pale blonde hair and delicate and symmetrical features. The stone had stung her left arm, just above the elbow. She was gripping the place with her right hand. She

was wrapped from and by the wind in a light top coat, and beyond these facts Sturges registered only that her expression was one of annoyance.

He was not impressed by a sense of impending adventure.

Letia Phelps had been annoyed even before the pebble had startled her. She was just as annoyed by being held over in Albuquerque as Sturges Strong was, and for very much the same reasons. Like Sturges, she was returning from a conquest in California, under no necessity for haste but piqued because the interruption was unplanned.

Letia's conquest in California had been rather more substantial than Sturges'. She had not only spent her time there being wined, dined, and complimented by the great, but had also managed to get herself paid \$5,000 a week for four weeks of doing it. While much of this would eventually be paid to the government in income taxes, it pleased her that she had been successful in refusing even to discuss the problem of adapting her book for the movies unless she was paid for the conversation. When Goldwyn had at first demurred, she had said, "Why, Mr. Goldwyn, it's just as if you were inviting a doctor to dinner in order to get a free diagnosis."

Goldwyn's executives had that morning presented him with an elaborate plan for publicizing his company's purchase of *Horse and Husband*. The scripts were already written for a short showing Goldwyn introducing Letia to Hollywood's great, with special attention to the great who were under contract to Goldwyn's studio. There was also a trailer to be made in which Letia would say that the movie version of *Horse and Husband* was even more fun than the original novel. Besides, if *Horse and Husband* were the success he expected it to be, Goldwyn would want to make sure that he had an option on a second Letia Long Phelps story, even if he had to have his own writers write it.

Goldwyn had not quite bargained on the fact that even after paying her \$5,000 a week as a consultant, he was presently to discover that she had also had her hotel bills charged to the studio, and had seen nothing out of place in using the two studio cars he put at her disposal to visit rival lots, there to discuss the possibility of doing other movies for other producers than himself. The houses with whom Letia had done business as the proprietress of Long House

could have told him to watch his step in a trade with her, but Hollywood was at least a generation away from the cloak and suit business by the time of Letia's arrival.

The consultations that Goldwyn got for his investment had, in the end, amounted to no more than two informal afternoons in his office, and one studio luncheon to which he managed to pin Letia down. At the studio luncheon, Letia met the professional writers, the producer, and the director whom Goldwyn had assigned to her picture, but these individuals were all too curious about Letia herself to keep their minds on getting any ideas she might have. Besides, Letia was at once her gayest and most dazzling self. She was very distracting.

Letia had enjoyed almost every moment of her stay in the environs of Hollywood, living happily in the moment. Her only thought for the future had been to send Susan and the secretary on ahead of her, to be sure that the penthouse would be properly prepared for her return to New York. She gave them eight hours' start. The very last thought that might have occurred to her was that her own flight east would be interrupted, and that she faced the possibility of a night alone in Albuquerque without even Susan to arrange her things for her.

On the first leg of the flight, the jump from Burbank to Albuquerque, Letia had spoken to no one. She had not even held private communion with the sunset. She had, in fact, composed herself, eaten supper on a tray and gone peacefully to sleep. She awoke thinking that they might already be in Chicago. The stewardess told her they were landing in Albuquerque.

Once on the ground, Letia, like Sturges, had then been informed that her forward progress would be delayed for a little. She had walked away from the lighted passenger depot simply because she thought that being alone would be more relaxing than being talked to by the other passengers who, like most people who came in contact with Letia, were eyeing her with curiosity.

And now in the darkness someone had struck her sharply on the arm with a small hard object.

To Sturges' silhouette she said sharply, "Watch out what you're doing, you there."

Thus did a little pebble warn of an impending avalanche, but neither Letia nor Sturges heeded its message.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### *The Miracle at Albuquerque*

TO UNDERSTAND HOW deeply Sturges Strong and Letia Phelps fell in love with each other, you have to understand not only the timing of the thing, coming as both of them rose to the very peak of their individual mastery of life, but also the true fact that neither of them had really known what it was like to love before they loved each other. They were, in fact, extraordinarily virginal personalities.

Letia's sudden bursting forth of feeling for Joe Rogers had been dammed up too soon. It had never cut a channel clear to her innermost feelings. She had lived the whole of her early life aware that she had a capacity to feel but never really feeling with her whole heart and mind and body.

Letia's marriage had been, at best, the unconscious deceit of a woman who was, emotionally, a eunuch; at worst, childish scheming. It had not been cynical, because cynicism implies disillusionment and Letia had had no illusions about her marriage to begin with. Solomon had been wholly physical, no more than a challenge to her as a woman. All the episodes of her life had been episodes of immaturity. She was a phenomenally talented little girl in the body of a grown woman, deceiving the world into thinking that she was a grown woman because to outward appearances she seemed like one. Actually all Letia's accomplishments had been the accomplishments of a diligent child prodigy who had learned the rules of the grown-ups' game quickly but who, as *The New Yorker's* critic had perceived, understood no more than the mechanisms of it.

But throughout the years, and despite whatever it was that had stunted her emotionally, Letia continued to grow slowly, and by the time she met Sturges, she was at last, and for the first time, an adult woman with an adult woman's capacity for experience. To this experience she brought the sophistication of years of success, and the self-confidence of the position she had achieved; but, otherwise, she came to it as one just

matured, feeling something new and wonderful and wholly absorbing for the first time.

Sturges had been even less touched by life than Letia. Together they confirmed the theory that like characters are more apt to fall deeply in love than opposites. Sturges may or may not have once been in love with little Joan. It all came too easily and he was too young, and after it was over he felt too guilty about his own part in it to learn any values from the experience. The rest of his life the creative side of his personality had been sublimated in his extraordinarily concentrated effort to succeed. Here also there was a similarity to Letia. Again and again, Letia's adolescent feelings of insecurity had driven her to tangible accomplishments in order to reassure herself. She coveted money like a miser yet often she spent it like a spendthrift. She could never have named a purpose for which she accumulated so much. Similarly, the sacrifices which Sturges made to insure the success of Facts, Inc., were out of all proportion to his real need for wealth.

It is true that men are often ambitious for ambition's sake, but a man's ambition can usually be translated into a desire to master other men or to gain some tangible objective. It can be explained in simple terms. Through the years during which he created a fortune, however, Sturges had no mental picture of what it was he sought. Far from envisaging the publishing empire that Facts, Inc., was to become, he could hardly understand it even after it had happened. He always thought that there was only one solid rock on which he should stand and that was the earning capacity of the first magazine he published. He acquired no personal extravagances until they were forced on him. He was always frightened lest the ambition of his associates carry the expansion of the corporation too far from its original base. His ambition to find a salve for his soul in the creation of literature had more of the stuff of fantasy in it than hard fact. His real drive to succeed was a function of nothing more than itself; he *had* to have success, for the sake of success, and dared not even stop to consider what this success might mean to himself or anyone else.

This kept Sturges, like Letia, in a state of suspended emotional growth. But, like her, he too continued to grow a little despite himself. When the facts of his financial security

became overwhelming, that security set him free to grow even more rapidly for a time, so that, starting later in life, and without even as much understanding as Letia had had, he overtook her. When they met, he was as ready to fall in love as she, and even less touched by previous experience with love.

To all lovers, God gives the sublime sense that they alone have found the true meaning. But most lovers are young and they cannot document their confidence that their love shall conquer the world. Letia and Sturges, on the other hand, were lovers each of whom had reason to believe that there was no world he or she could not conquer alone.

This was the most amazing fact of all to both of them, that out of all the world each should fall in love with the one person who was the other's equal, so that together there was really and truly nothing that could stand before them. They were awestruck by the scale of the power they felt they created, just by being in love with each other. It seemed now to them both that the rise of each to eminence had been effortless, and yet now they knew that without each other they had been as nothing. Combined in love, it was a pity only that the obstacles the world presented were so puny compared to their prowess.

Letia's and Sturges' arrival on this elevated plane did not take them long. The evening on which the pebble brought them together began with the most casual of conversations. When the next turn of the revolving beam showed Letia that her assailant was a youngish man with an almost boyish grin, and well dressed, she relaxed a little. She presumed that he was a passenger on her own plane whom she had not noticed. The same turn of the airway beam showed her again to Sturges, this time in a better light, and he perceived, despite the wind-blown top coat she wore, that she was an unusually attractive woman. Letia's looks put her easily in a class with the professional model he had known.

Sturges now apologized for the pebble and Letia laughed. "Sticks and stones may break my bones," she quoted, "but say nice things and I'm not hurt at all. How long do you think we'll be here?"

"Lord knows," said Sturges. "That was your plane on the ground when I came in, wasn't it?" He was pleased to note that he had unconsciously opened the conversation by calling

attention to the privileged nature of his own arrival at the airport.

"Oh, so you're the gay young pilot who kept bouncing up and down trying to land."

"No pilot, I," said Sturges. "I just rent the thing."

"I'm Letia Phelps," said Letia, feeling that her turn to impress had come. Sturges Strong replied with his own name and made a little bow in the darkness.

The curious thing about this exchange of names, one already extremely well known and the other important in its own world, was that neither of the mighty pair could immediately place the other. The names were familiar, but . . . This is more of an indictment of Sturges than of Letia because, after all, he was a journalist and there was already an impressive folder of clippings in Facts, Inc.'s magazine under the name Phelps, Letia—cross-indexed under Long, Letia (Phelps) and Long House. But when Sturges had been doing his own editing, Letia's was still a name known only in the Society columns, and Society was not a *Facts'* specialty. Sturges automatically shut his mind to the names of artists and writers. They were for his specialists to keep track of.

It was less surprising that Letia did not recognize the name of the rising young publisher, for her principal contacts with the press were with daily journals and the representatives of the slicker-papered magazines.

Each of them was immediately conscious of the fact that the other's Who's Who was not in working condition. Sturges immediately confirmed Letia's suspicions by asking, in his bluntest fact-finding manner, just who she was and why she was there.

Letia said she had written a book and was coming from Hollywood, where they were going to make it into a movie. Sturges said that was wonderful and what was the name of the book? When she told him, he hadn't really heard of that either.

"I think I've seen it advertised," he said. "Really, that's marvelous. I congratulate you." He had genuine enthusiasm in his voice. This enthusiasm continued to keep the tenor of his conversation from being patronizing, yet he made it clear to Letia that he was speaking down to her from a position of authority which he took for granted.

Letia's first reaction was to be half nettled, half amused.

Then she found herself curiously pleased. After Hollywood, it was almost refreshing to talk to someone who was so very unmoved by who she was. She felt a little of the thrill that a queen, traveling incognito, might find in conversation with an attractive commoner—yet even more than that, because she had presented her own credentials as a successful novelist and yet this man was not the least impressed by them. She began actually to wonder who he was and was half fearful that she might take him down too quickly when she asked him. Quite simply he said, "I own some magazines."

"Oh?" said Letia.

"Only one, really—*Facts*—but we may be starting another next year."

"Oh?" said Letia again. She was quite familiar with the name of *his* creation. She knew that Joe Rogers had left *The New Yorker* to work for this man some time ago. It gave her a sudden interest in Sturges to think that he now employed the man who had been her first love.

She said, "Joe Rogers works for you, doesn't he?" and then was a little sorry because by her question she was placing herself on a level with one of his employees. Obviously he did not know how far she had come since Joe.

"Sure," said Sturges easily. "He's one of the policy editors. He's done very well with us." Now his tone really was patronizing.

They stood awkwardly while talking, because there was nothing to attract them from where they were. The alternating green and white light from the marker beacon gave the conversation a queer illuminated punctuation, for they could only see each other at rigidly fixed intervals which had no relation to what they were saying.

Now Sturges said, "I'd be happy to buy you a drink while we're waiting. Do you like being a successful novelist? I mean, do you get a kick out of it?"

They walked in little halts, balancing in the gusty wind, to the passenger depot. Letia and Sturges had hardly arrived and begun to take inventory of the facilities when a loudspeaker in the corner crackled and announced, "Passengers on TWA Eastbound Flight 4, your flight will lay over for the night here. A bus will take you to the hotel. Please announce your names to the stewardess as you enter the bus."

The loudspeaker was silent, crackled again, and then said

clearly, "Is Mr. Sturges Strong here? Mr. Sturges Strong, please. Accommodations have been reserved for you with the passengers of TWA Eastbound Flight 4. Will you take a seat in the bus with the TWA passengers, please?"

Both Sturges and Letia said "Damn"—and laughed because they had exclaimed almost in unison.

Sturges said, "We'll have none of that bus business. May I take you into town in a taxi?" Then he busied himself getting one and they went off together through the warm desert night.

The hotel to which the stewardess had directed them was not the Harvey Hotel by the depot but a big skyscraper-like affair some blocks away. It was only 9 o'clock when they got there. They went to the bar to the rear of the lobby. It was a big room with booths along one side and a shiny old-fashioned bar across the other. There were animals' antlers on the wall. The decorator must have felt an obligation to make the room remind its guests that they were in the picturesque West. The tablecloths in the booths were of red checked gingham.

It had been a long time since Sturges had been impressed at finding himself alone with a pretty girl. He was pleased that he was effortlessly in command of the situation. Arriving ahead of the other passengers, he immediately got the attention of a waiter. Letia would not drink champagne but felt in the mood for bourbon. Sturges said her choice was appropriate. Bourbon was the *vin du pays*. He picked the most expensive brand from the waiter's recital.

Letia was still wrapped in her top coat, for the night had grown chilly outside. She wore her hair severely gathered at the back of her head. The wind and the sand on the field had flattened her make-up and only a connoisseur would have noted that she was a much more than ordinarily pretty girl. As the evening proceeded, his paying no particular attention to her looks heightened the effect Sturges was producing, the illusion that he was taking for granted everything she had to offer and was unimpressed. As one after another of her claims to fame came out in the conversation, Letia found herself still further humbled. Sturges had never been interested in art and not even such names as Picasso or Matisse would have got more than a nod of recognition from him.

Randolph Phelps he knew of only as the owner of a racing stable that had not had many winners that spring.

In addition to Joe Rogers, they found they had one other mutual friend—good old James Aloysius Falkenstall of Wood, Wickersham, Root, Sullivan and Taft. Falkenstall was an important character in Letia's life; he was the man who had managed her divorce for her and whom she had promoted to the status of guardian of her treasury. But to Sturges, Falkenstall seemed simply an unimportant relative of his wife's. For the moment, Sturges had no high opinion of Jimmy Falkenstall's effectiveness as a lawyer because of his failure to secure Sturges the honorary degree from Yale University.

By the time they had gone over Falkenstall, Letia was truly, and for the first time in her life, reduced to an almost submissive role. It was more extraordinary that she not only tolerated being put there but was consciously enjoying the new position in which she found herself. Otherwise, she was unaware that anything was happening to her. It did not even occur to her that, with twice his natural wit, she could have reduced Sturges to inarticulateness if she had chosen.

For his part, Sturges had never before been so fluent or so successful with a woman. His failure to be impressed by Letia's background was genuine, but he was becoming increasingly aware of how desirable she was as a woman.

The waiter came and the waiter went and a big clock on the wall beyond the bar showed them that it was after midnight. They had each had a great deal to drink, but they were so stimulated by each other that neither of them felt in the least intoxicated. Only a few of the other passengers who had trooped in after them were left, and presently these, too, paid their checks.

When the tiring waiter showed signs of restlessness, Sturges handled that as easily as his other problems. He called the waiter over to the table and put a twenty-dollar bill in his hand. With a smile that was friendly but unequivocal he said, "Look, old man, we're not grounded here every night and you'll make us awfully happy if you stay open a little while."

Their conversation became more personal. Letia told Sturges that she had asked about Joe because he used to be in love with her. Sturges said that Joe was a very attractive fellow. He talked to Letia about Mary for a while with just the right tone of understanding friendliness to convey the impression

that Mary was a character in his life who amused him, and of whom he was fond, but with whom he had no serious relationship. Letia told Sturges that there were no men in her life, that she had not wanted any men since the hurricane.

She told Sturges the story of Solomon and the hurricane and, for the first time, Sturges was more interested in what she had to say than in what he was telling her. Letia's version was anything but unbiased.

"That son of a bitch," he said when Letia finished her way of telling it. "That real son of a bitch."

Letia had long since discarded her coat and was now revealed in a demurely simple traveling dress of her own creation. Her make-up was refreshed and her hair had been rearranged into neatness. Presently it began to come apart a second time, because so many things that Sturges said now made her laugh and shake her head. The disarray now had its own charm to Sturges.

Sturges told Letia that he had once had an unhappy experience with love himself. He was more honest than she in telling about his affair with Joan. He was quite frank about it being his own fault that it had come to nothing.

"I was too young," he said. "I had too much ahead of me to do."

He now perceived how very much more alluring Letia was than Joan. He had never met a woman who was dressed as well as Letia was dressed, or who took it as casually for granted. He also saw, quite accurately, that she was infinitely more of a person than any woman he had ever met in the little restaurant around the corner from the Racquet Club. Even before he came to want her for herself, he recognized that she had quality, that she was something superior. Her eyes were shining now and the pupils were very large in the dim light of the empty barroom. No one who had ever seen Letia in one of her imperious moods would have believed that she could look as she looked then—all youth and melting sweetness.

"To Sturges, now, came his test as a man-of-the-world. He knew that he wanted Letia and he saw that Letia wanted him. The first brisk pace in their conversation had slowed to their longer monologues about themselves and was now come to a full stop. So far Sturges had been the complete master,

but now he was suddenly brought up short by the mechanics of seduction.

They had come from the airport directly to the bar. Sturges did not even know whether either of them had a room to themselves in the hotel and the horrid thought came to him that perhaps the passengers had been doubled up. It was one thing to bribe a waiter to keep a bar open, quite another to persuade a night clerk in a strange hotel to enter into a conspiracy so that he and Letia might sleep together. It was the melting girl in the demure costume who solved his problem.

"Come," she said in a little whisper. "Come, darling," and it seemed to be no problem at all to her to ask the clerk at the desk for their respective keys and then to take his hand after the elevator had left them on the same floor and to lead him to the room to which her key fitted.

It was a real marvel to Sturges how easily it was done.

To Sturges, walking hand in hand down that last corridor that separated them was emotionally like the gathering rush down the field an aircraft must make before it is airborne. Later he could look back and think that he was not in love then, that it was only to be a very gay adventure, the gayest he had known, but still only an adventure. But maybe it had really happened when he had first seen her in the dusk and he had not known it. Or maybe it had happened sometime when they were talking together, when he found himself saying such amazingly honest things to her about himself. But on sober consideration he thought, no—it had happened later in the whole unity of being one with her.

Whenever it had begun, by dawn it had happened completely. He knew that Letia was the most wonderful creature that God had ever created and that the least little gesture she made, the shake of her head, the turn of her wrist, was infinitely more attractive than the most alluring movement any other woman could make with all of her, and the trappings of a stage costume and a spotlight thrown in. He knew that the meaning of all emotions was in Letia's eyes, and that when they looked at each other their eyes spoke in a language more rapid than words, more rapid, and subtler, and full of an infinitude of meanings.

He knew that when she touched him or when he touched her, however casually and lightly, it was like the caress of

a flame which did not burn but whose whole vitality went into healing and making well. He knew that he was as alive as any human being could be alive.

Passing a mirror, Sturges saw his own face and he was astonished to see a face he had never seen before—a face so full of lines of happiness. He laughed at his laughing face in the mirror and was suddenly conscious that his grinning smile was at once so new and so intense that the muscles in his cheeks ached.

Everything Sturges felt about Letia seemed to come back to him from her wonderfully transformed into womanly emotions. It was quite real. Everything that Letia had felt so long ago, and so briefly, for Joe, she felt again now only more wholly and deeper and now without anxiety. Sturges was everything and she belonged wholly to him. It was the measure of his strength, of which she was so proud, that she who had felt so strong herself now felt submissive to him.

Such feelings flooded both of them and made them so vibrant that they had no sense of not having slept or eaten, nor was there any rudeness to them in the wall telephone by the door ringing when the sun was hardly up, to tell Mrs. Phelps that Flight 4 was about to be on its way again. They felt that they would never be apart again.

After Letia had hung up the telephone, Sturges called the field himself from Letia's room, undisturbed by convention. After a wait, he was able to talk to his own pilot. He would, of course, take Letia back with him. He would ride her away with him on the back of his own steed. Dreamily they set out from the hotel to find a taxi which would take them to the airport.

It took the Lockheed all day to get to New York. The long hours of droning over the plains, the slow climb up over the Alleghenies, the drop down to the coast—to Letia and Sturges, the routine flight took only minutes, or was part of an eternity of bliss, according to their mood. Weariness overtook them once and they slept for a while, with Letia's tangled blonde hair a wind-drifted pattern on Sturges' shoulder. When they woke, they looked at one another with their eyes wide and shining and the new lines of happiness deepened in their faces. Their new faces were, to the faces they had worn only yesterday, like the features of statues touched

into life by a chuckling God. To neither of them did their new life seem to present any problems whatever.

Sturges hardly thought of the fact that he had a wife. When he did, a momentary sadness came over him that Mary could not feel what he felt. Pity for her loneliness welled up in him. But he would make her understand. Just having a part to play in a love as great as his and Letia's would be a kind of recompense to Mary for the barrenness of her existence. He wished that Mary could feel for someone some fraction of what he felt for Letia. A sigh escaped him because he doubted that she had the capacity. Dear, good, serious-minded Mary! Well, she had the children.

Sturges then wondered if he would miss his first children. He doubted it. He could not remember how he had happened to have them. He would really make a child now, with Letia—a child conceived as a child should be, in the wholeness of love. He found that he was trembling all over, thinking of how wonderful it was when he and Letia were one. They were not just one body; they were one body, one thought, one feeling.

This was as God meant it to be and, for a second, Sturges felt that he had fulfilled his need for a whole faith in God. There was no flaw in his faith now; the dross had been burned away in the awful intensity of knowing Letia.

Then he lapsed into an interlude of pure well-being. He lay swathed in his sense of well-being. He felt every fibre of his body down to the tip of each toe and finger, and every particle of him felt alive and good. He did not talk much to Letia with words. Their love was too fluid to need words.

To Letia came more practical thoughts. All the things that Sturges had told her about himself passed through her mind and she marveled at his perfection. He had everything she lacked—steadfastness of purpose, ability to dominate men. He did not have to use tricks to succeed. He was a male who could impose his will on the world, as he had imposed it on her. The act of sex itself was symbolic of all relationships between men and women—the male dominant, the female submissive, receptive. She had not been a woman at all, before. And now it was wonderful to be a woman. Only Sturges had been able to make her a woman and a true sense of gratitude moved her. She was at home with herself at last.

She thought, then, of their arrival in New York and of

what Sturges would ask of her when they got there. She could not bear the thought of being separated physically from him, but there would be things he would have to be doing. There was his wife Mary to dispose of. She did not wonder what Mary was like. He would arrange to send his old wife to Reno. Until that was over he could live in the penthouse or, Letia thought, he might ask her to make a new home for him at once. She thought happily that with a lesser man she would have had to worry about whether he could be hurt, by scandal or by having to hurt his wife. But Sturges' stature was so great that what might destroy another would leave *him* untouched. An important publisher need fear no man; he made people think whatever pleased him. And Sturges was a rich man, too, who could pay Mary whatever was required to fulfill whatever little dreams the poor creature had.

After disposing of these matters, Letia thought only in hazy fragments—of Susan's face when she would see what had happened, of Orlando trying to hide his excitement. How could Orlando keep to his character of blasé sophisticate in the face of such world-shattering news? She wondered what her first present to Sturges would be. She thought about flowers to decorate their room. She took a pencil from her purse and a notebook and began writing down her new name. "*Letia Long Strong, Letia and Sturges Strong, Letia Long Strong.*"

She caught Sturges' eye and they both giggled.

Most of their first day together, however, they spent neither thinking nor dreaming but simply feeling. They were filled to overflowing with emotion. And they were absolutely certain that no lovers had ever before felt what they felt for each other with the same intensity. They could be sure of this because they knew that, even individually, each of them was such a superior person.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### *Sturges Breaks the News*

THE MOOD IN which Sturges and Letia traveled east from Albuquerque, in Sturges' chartered plane, lasted them for three days after they got back to New York. That is to say, their need simply to be with each other, just to be alive together, occupied them wholly. Their immediate need for each other was a barrier through which the world could not penetrate.

Recalling those first three ecstatic days, they remembered that Sturges had seen Mary once, but that had taken only a few hours. Mary, of course, took it for granted that Sturges would work in town for a while after being away so long. And another day, Sturges had dropped gaily in on his associates at the office and even dictated a précis of what he had found out from Hearst in California. Never had words come so rapidly and easily to him, although every second he was away from Letia he felt an almost unendurable impatience to return to her. The précis of the Hearst story Sturges gave to McNulty, telling him to pass it on to any good writer to put in shape for publication. In another hour at the office he had spoken briefly with most of his important people, one by one, and the problems they had saved for him to solve melted away. It was all so easy. Now that he knew the real secret of life, the little puzzles that his organization generated were child's play. He had never known how easy life was to manage before. Everything he had done before had been labored; now he could accomplish one hundred times as much without effort.

On their arrival they had gone from the airport to Letia's penthouse and Letia had no more difficulty than Sturges in disposing of the demands of those who were dependent on her. To a few people like Orlando and her publisher, she spoke trippingly on the telephone, making faces at Sturges while the people on the other end of the line were talking. Susan and the secretary took care of the others.

Letia's little staff had melted before the lovers' radiance.

They were overcome by the change that had taken place in their mistress and had the whole day long to talk of it because so little was asked of them. The meals they prepared were uneaten; they had only to tell whomever called that Mrs. Phelps was away.

On the third day, Sturges and Letia went out to lunch at the Stork Club, but they still could not bring themselves to eat food. They were unashamed about how much in love they were with each other. They were very conspicuous in the restaurant and many people whom they had never seen before smiled at them. But it was at that first lunch at Sherman Billingsley's that they began peeping over their wall at the world outside. A number of lunchers, of course, recognized Letia. She was very proud of their seeing her with Sturges. The time was close for them to allow the world a little share of their abundant happiness.

From time to time during those first days, they had talked of what would come next, but they were sure that everything was so easy that there was no reason for haste. But now, seeing how many people were friends of Letia's, Sturges thought that it was unfair of him to put off legalizing her status. Besides, he wanted to tell everyone he knew of the miracle of Albuquerque. So, walking home from the restaurant with Letia, he began to plan.

Perhaps the first mistake Sturges made was not obeying his impulse to tell Letia what was going through his mind. So far he had reserved no thoughts, however trivial, but for some reason he now concluded that there was a certain lack of propriety in talking to the woman he loved about his plans for divorcing the woman he was married to.

It is also possible that Sturges was ashamed of the sense of intimacy he was feeling for his wife. He wanted to share his wonderful news with her. This was, of course, an emotion he could not share with Letia; and yet he was already decided that the way to persuade Mary to divorce him was to appeal to her on the basis of the intimacy he felt. Its foundation was Mary's devotion to his interests.

Sturges felt that he had only to show Mary how much he was in love with Letia and Mary would see at once that no question remained about where his best interests were. Mary would see that he *had* to have Letia, that his very existence was

dependent on it. And she would, of course, give him what he wanted, in the name of their years together.

But all this depended on his coming to Mary as the husband and friend with whom she had spent so many years, as the father of her children—not, Sturges felt strongly, as the new man he really was, to whom those years had never really existed because he had not known what really being alive could be like. The feeling of guilt toward Letia came from the mere fact that he still had *any* relationship with another woman after he had known her.

It almost worked. Sturges left Letia, telling her only that he was going to get the divorce business started. Mary had been unperceptive about his ebullience on his first visit. It was a total surprise to her when he took her for a drive in the old Pontiac, parked it by the roadside on a hilltop, and announced to her that he had fallen wonderfully in love. He spoke to her at length about Letia. First he gave Mary the narrative of the meeting in Albuquerque, told as a journalist. Then, warming to his work, he painted a picture of what it was like to love someone and be loved by them. As a matter obviously of form, he told Mary that he was damned sorry that he had to hurt her, and then, warm with sincerity, he added that the only unfulfilled hope he had was that Mary would one day find what he had found.

Mary did not hear a great deal of this. She went into shock rather rapidly, her eyes so wide that the next day she did not know why her eyelids ached. She leaned forward toward him in her anxiety to understand, and her head made little twitching movements as she scanned his face, her whole head moving instead of her eyeballs which were frozen in the fixity of a glare.

She kept saying, "Of course, of course, Sturges."

From time to time, instead of twitching, her head would nod up and down in assent.

Finally, not knowing where the words were coming from, she heard herself saying, "I think it's really wonderful for you, Sturges. No, you mustn't think of me. Of course I'm all right," and then, "When do you want me to do something about it, Sturges? Should I tell people right away?"

Actually, if Sturges had driven her from the hilltop to the railway station and put a sum of money in her hand, Mary would probably have awakened on her way to Reno. Once in

Reno, she would certainly have seen no reason for, no hope of, coming back still Sturges' wife. There was no other world for her except Sturges' and there isn't much one can do about it when one is pushed off the edge of the world. But Sturges now felt so completely successful that instead of putting Mary on a train, he said, "You mustn't hurry, Mary. You'll want to get someone to look after the children and I don't want you to feel upset by hurrying. Suppose you go the end of next week? And I don't think you ought to talk to anyone until then. They might not understand."

Mary said, "No, of course not," and undoubtedly meant it, but that evening, after Sturges had gone, Falkenstall made his weekly trip over to see Mary to report on the progress of the undertaking at Port Chester. He was as interested in the Strongs' building project as if it were his own dream castle, and when Sturges had gone away he had taken to conferring about it with Mary. At Port Chester, they had got as far as the plastering, and Falkenstall had all kinds of decisions to get from her—on where bookcases were to go and which way she would like doors to open and so forth.

This line of talk was altogether too much for Mary who, by dinnertime, was just starting to emerge from the anesthesia of the shock and was beginning to hurt all over. She had as little appetite as Sturges and Letia had had the first few days, and Falkenstall had not been at dinner five minutes before he knew that something was *very* wrong. He made conversation until they were alone in the living room, and then he got it all out of Mary in a very few minutes. The news was so big in his world that he was too excited to react to it for a while.

"But I didn't know they even knew each other," he said, shaking his head in wonder. "She's a client of mine, you know."

"*You* know her too? Will she be good for him? I tried to tell you, they didn't know each other until they met in Albuquerque. Sturges said he had never even heard of her. I had. You see her picture everywhere. She looks so *hard*."

"I don't know, Mary. I don't think I ever thought of Letia Phelps as a woman. I mean you forget how damned good-looking she *is* when you do business with her. She's awfully smart, Mary."

"Then she tricked him into it, Jim. I know she tricked him

into it. You should have seen him. He's never been like this before."

"I wouldn't want to tangle with her," said Falkenstall reflectively.

"I'll tangle with her," said Mary, her anger rising at last. "I'll tear her eyes out. She's just after his money."

Falkenstall laughed. "No," he said, "I wouldn't know what she was after. She's got plenty of money. God knows, she's got everything."

They had been seated side by side on the sofa facing the mantel, but Mary had risen and was striding around the room, picking things up off the table and putting them down without knowing what she was doing.

"Jim, I'm going to have her arrested. I'm going to have her locked up for what she's done to Sturges. Here—" she came to rest by the telephone which stood on a table by the sofa—"take this and call up somebody. Do something, Jim. Do something right now!"

"Easy, Mary, easy," said Falkenstall, whose own mind was beginning to function again. He was not a man who was ill at ease when he found himself straddling a fence, or even on both sides of it, but this being caught up in a conflict involving his two most important clients was something else again. From the violence of Mary's reaction, and from what he knew of Letia, and from what Mary had told him of how Sturges felt, this was not one of those conflicts which a lawyer can handle by soothing both parties into reasonableness and working out a satisfyingly sensible compromise. The least little misstep, he realized, and he would be committed to some part in the kind of legal dog fight that, as a lawyer, he most abhorred. It could end a very dirty business.

"Mary," he said sharply, "Sturges hasn't told me anything about this and all I know about it is from you. Now you are not to do anything until we find out more about it."

Mary was shivering with rage, but the aggressiveness was oozing out of her now and it was all too new to her really to know what she felt. She sat down abruptly on the floor at Falkenstall's feet and began softly to cry. She looked up at the lawyer and said pleadingly, "You're not going to send me to Reno, are you? You're not going to send me away?"

"Of course I'm not going to send you anywhere, Mary," said Falkenstall, thinking hard. "I don't think Sturges would

like me getting hold of him now, either. I think what we'll do is nothing until he gets around to calling me."

"I can stay here, then?" said Mary. "I don't have to go away?"

"You stay right here, darling. You don't do anything until you hear from me again. If Sturges calls and asks you when you're going, just tell him soon."

Falkenstall had been only momentarily confused. As soon as his mind began working again, he concluded that his only problem was to keep a firm rein on Mary until she got used to the idea and could be persuaded to go peacefully. Both Sturges and Letia would turn to him the minute either of them saw a legal obstacle rising in their path, and if he got Mary into the hands of the right lawyer, removing that obstacle should be easy. He kicked himself for not having taken advantage of Mary's very first mood of compliance. She was old Van Voort's daughter and she could be stubborn if she had a mind to be. He had only opened the door for trouble by letting Mary begin to think for herself. Now he must quickly get her a lawyer with whom he, Falkenstall, representing Sturges, could make a deal.

The whole thing could not have been more important to Falkenstall, and after a careful canvass of his friends, he picked out a young man named Chambers, who owed him a return on several legal favors. The trouble was, and he saw it clearly, that because of the amount of money that Mary could reasonably expect to persuade Sturges to part with, no ordinary considerations would insure her attorney's loyalty to him. Chambers was a young lawyer who was in debt to Falkenstall for throwing a number of unimportant cases his way and for persuading one of Wood, Wickersham's clients to accept a settlement from one of Chambers' in a litigation which he was sure Chambers did not expect to win. His own reasons for having advocated the settlement were unknown to Chambers and had nothing to do with the case. Under ordinary circumstances, Chambers would have been only too willing to discharge these obligations by conniving with him to make a reasonable divorce settlement. But Sturges' wealth was no secret and God, how dead to rights Mary had him! If half of what Mary had told him about how the lovers felt was true, Mary's lawyer could ask his own price.

And that of course is exactly what Falkenstall's friend

Chambers did. Being himself as opportunistic as Falkenstall, he was quite willing to risk the latter's hostility in exchange for representing Mrs. Strong in a successful action which would net his client some millions of dollars in cash and himself several hundred thousand. And in the end, there was nothing that Falkenstall, representing Letia as well as Sturges, could do about it except, at all costs, to conceal from Sturges the knowledge that it was he who had brought Chambers into Mary's life. Chambers' only concession to friendship was to help Falkenstall keep that secret.

All his life, Sturges would never hate another man as he came to hate Winthrop Chambers, for Chambers was the man who saw to it that Mary did not budge till the papers had been signed which gave into her keeping three millions of his dollars together, of course, with the mansion at Port Chester. There was even that awful all-night session in which even this had not seemed enough for Chambers. He had had the gall to ask that, in addition, Sturges personally insure the settlement against the adverse effects of a currency inflation. Chambers had even acted as if he had been doing Strong a favor when, at last, he withdrew this absurd demand. He would not budge, however, on two trust funds of a million dollars each, for the children. The final bill: five million plus.

The conclusion of Sturges Strong's negotiations with Winthrop Chambers took a little over six months. By the time it was over, the wall that shielded the love that Sturges and Letia had for each other from the world was breached in a dozen places.

The largest breach, of course, was the breach that Chambers had made, for through it flooded forth from Sturges' subconscious all the fears for his own security which he thought were long gone in his past. To pay the fantastic price he had to give for his freedom, he was required again to mortgage all his holdings in the corporation on which he was dependent. Having mortgaged these holdings, he was then, in addition, required to pay the last of the still inflooding bills from the Port Chester construction project. And what was left had to float the dream craft of his life with Letia, had to support love's prodigal fancies and to satisfy his normal instinct for giving appropriate gifts to the woman he loved.

The second largest breach through which the world intruded on Letia and Sturges was opened by Sturges himself in his

exuberant inexperience. It was caused by the opposition to his divorce and remarriage which he himself generated among his associates.

There was no reason in the world why Sturges should have had any trouble with his associates at Facts, Inc. He owned 52 per cent of the stock to begin with, but even that was not the full measure of his security. During those first years after Allen Bishop had gone, Sturges had needed the authority of ownership to hold in hand the incipient revolt against his leadership. But Allen Bishop was long since no more than a legend. Few of the writers or editors now at *Facts* had even known him; he had never played any real part in the commercial operations of the house. Sturges was the master not by virtue of the paper in the bank vault alone but also because he had established his mastery by his indomitable energy and persistence, and by the fact that every man of importance to the company owed his position to, and measured his security by, Sturges' favor.

Had Sturges handled the problem of his divorce and remarriage as he had handled the business problems he had disposed of so easily the first hour he spent in the office after his return, there would have been a buzz of comment and no more reaction than an ungrudged admiration for the boss's ability to get what he wanted no matter what it cost or whom it hurt. All its adult life, Facts, Inc., had been a place where subtler values were discounted.

Sturges could have said nothing to anyone, or at the most, he could have given the happy news of his emancipation to a few who were closest to him and left it to them to see that it was presented in the proper light to their other associates and to the trade. But after the first momentum of his feeling was spent, Sturges was not up to such simplicity.

In the first place, as soon as he began thinking at all about himself and Letia, he made a lover's normal miscalculation of the importance to an unawakened world of what was happening to him. All lovers expect the rest of the world to be struck dumb by the awful wonder of the phenomenon. But Sturges had to consider that he and Letia were not just any two people in love but were each in their own right amongst the most important individuals in the world. Of Letia's importance as a national—even as an international—figure, Sturges had now no doubts whatever. After he was in love with her,

all her accomplishments were enlarged and given new importance. He was very very proud of everything that Letia was to the world—a great writer, a magnificent painter, the world's most successful business woman, an important social figure and, in addition, many times a millionairess by virtue of her unique ability.

His own evaluation of himself had been soaring before he met Letia. Now that he was in love, all his doubts about whether he had earned his position, or whether it was as important as he suspected it was, were dispelled. He knew now that he was already one of the world's great figures, and that if it pleased him to continue as a publisher, what he had accomplished to date was as nothing to what he would eventually accomplish. He was, then, quite carried away by the enormity of the story, by the sheer journalistic value of the story of this great love coming to these great people.

In his time a king had given up the throne of England for a woman, but Windsor and Wally Simpson, Sturges felt, were as nothing compared to himself and Letia. Windsor was important only because he had been born to be a king, and who was Wally before he gave up the throne for her? If Windsor had been a man, he would have kept Wally *and* the throne—but the parallel was there. Like Windsor, he, Sturges, was a king, and a king who had *earned* his throne. Unlike Windsor, *he* would be aware of the importance of *his* union in love. He would not pretend like Windsor that the throne did not matter. Keeping the throne, and keeping the throne intact, was part of what he as a man had to give Letia as his woman, as his queen.

These grandiose thoughts soon drifted Sturges into making a project out of taking his associates and his directors, and even his important rivals, into his confidence. He wanted no obstacles in his path when the time came for her coronation as his queen.

It is amazing how one man's fantasy can be misunderstood by other men who do not share it. It was Sturges' fantasy that Letia would come to rule with him over Facts, Inc., as his queen, with the corridors figuratively echoing with the shouts of their subjects' approval. He had never thought of himself as the king of Facts, Inc., before and, of course, had no precise picture of a queen's responsibilities in an organization devoted to publishing magazines. It was therefore simply of the psycho-

logical attitude of the organization toward Letia as a queen that Sturges thought.

He wanted his people to see that she was as wonderful as she was and to be proud of her and to love and worship her as he did. And he wanted, for her, the satisfaction of their acknowledgment of her status. Actually he would probably have been content with the respect that is paid any boss's wife, sincere or insincere, but he thought he had to get more than that for her.

What he did first was to make a ceremony of initiating each one of his top executives—Fairstreet, McNulty, Brennan, Schulberg, even Joe Rogers—into the mystery of his love for Letia and her breathtaking uniqueness and her love for him. This immediately aroused everyone's suspicion that some very fundamental change was about to take place in their life at Facts, Inc. Bear in mind that Sturges had first been away from his organization for several weeks in California, the longest he had ever absented himself from their midst, and that, thereafter, he had mysteriously stayed away for several more weeks.

Next Sturges took it unto himself to seek out the directors of Facts, Inc. These important people were totally bewildered. They had never been consulted privately about any of *Facts'* affairs and had remained virtual strangers to Sturges, who saw them only at the infrequent directors' meetings at which they voted perfunctorily to approve his successful policies. Even if his policies had been less successful than they were, the directors were still there by his pleasure because he could out-vote them personally in any proxy battle. But now, for reasons that they could not guess, he arranged a series of luncheon appointments, with each of them in turn, at which, with beaming exuberance, he told them the secret of his forthcoming marriage.

When one or two of Sturges' directors recovered sufficiently to ask him what all this had to do with Facts, Inc., Sturges was astonished that they should ask, and quite unprepared to give them an answer. The only honest answer was one which would have taken them into his innermost confidences, into regions which he hardly understood himself. So he said the first thing that came into his head, which was that he wanted to protect Facts, Inc., from the repercussions of scandal which that God-damned attorney of the present Mrs. Strong's might threaten. He said that, after all, Facts, Inc., did business with all kinds

of advertisers and that he didn't know what their reaction might be. It was well known, for instance, that Henry Ford hired spies to police his employees' morality. His, Sturges', whole relationship with Letia might be misunderstood and could mean the loss of advertising accounts.

Now this, of course, was the most complete poppycock and Sturges knew it well. Few people cared less about his private life than his advertisers. But although Sturges knew he was talking through his hat, his directors didn't.

Facts, Inc., then had seven directors in addition to its founder. Four were bankers, two lawyers, and the seventh a retired capitalist. Their world was a world in which the breath of scandal really burned. In the House of Morgan, the sanction of the senior partners is sometimes required for the marriage of a junior partner. An indiscretion on Broadway may be punishable by the loss of a job and the ruin of a career on Broad Street. Only those who are established beyond question have a right to private lives or public scandals. So the directors thought they understood what Sturges meant about the dangers of a scandal in connection with his leaving his wife and two children for a woman whose name, while not notorious, was far too well known to be reassuring. One of their reactions was to think more of Sturges for having at least the sense to see the risks that he was running, the danger to the earning capacity of his company.

And, finally, Sturges even went, with a case he couldn't articulate, to the very men who had the most reason to wish him ill fortune. He was no friend of Harry Luce's, into whose income Facts, Inc., was cutting, but he did have a lurching acquaintance with Ralph Ingersoll, who had been Luce's vice-president and general manager. Sturges thought the friendly Ingersoll would be a good fellow to get the ball rolling, to break the news of an important change in the Facts, Inc., dynasty to the trade. After Ingersoll had given the world the news, Letia's reputation would be proof against surprise. The surest way to stop unfavorable publicity, Sturges assured himself, is to break the news yourself, while you still have an opportunity to present it in the proper light.

Seeking a conversational opportunity at luncheon in the Chrysler Building's Cloud Club, Sturges asked Ingersoll why Luce had never made his talented wife, Clare, an editor in his

organization, particularly since she had once been the editor of a magazine herself.

When Ingersoll said he guessed it was just that Clare was not ambitious to be the editor of another magazine, even one of Harry's, Sturges asked him if he would mind keeping a confidence and then told him the wonderful news that he, Sturges, was in love with, and about to marry, a woman even more beautiful than Clare Luce and even more talented. He said speculatively, "I don't know what difference it's going to make to *Facts*, but Letia is a very extraordinary woman, Ralph."

This juxtaposition of Sturges' ideas immediately convinced Ingersoll that Sturges was about to turn the administration of his company over to Letia Phelps. Ingersoll had known Letia for many years and vastly admired her. He was also, unlike Sturges' own associates, a man who knew a little about what being in love can do to a man. Preposterous as the notion might have seemed to others, Ingersoll thought it quite possible that Sturges would go through with giving Letia *Facts, Inc.*, as a present. And this *would* be big news in the publishing world. Ingersoll knew a little about the history of Long House, too; he immediately began to take stock of what Long House policies might do to Time, Inc.'s number one rival.

To give the business a final twist, Sturges began his conversations at a moment when Falkenstall had too optimistically informed him that he knew Mary's new lawyer and that he anticipated no difficulty in settling with him. By the time the trouble with Chambers began, Sturges had gone too far to get back to shore, and his conversations regarding the possible effect of his marriage on *Facts, Inc.*, were followed up only by news that Sturges was now having trouble with the wife he was trying to rid himself of.

The result of all this was a small but reasonably concerted movement, led by a few of the stuffer directors, which sought to find some way to dissuade him from marrying Letia. This movement was quickly magnified by rumor into an important full-scale revolt among his executives. One or two of the wives of these executives now fuelled the fire by gossiping about Letia in a way of which their husbands were the last to approve. There had been enough in Letia's life to gossip about and a certain amount of the story of Joe Rogers was known to many people in the publishing world.

Now, after so many years, Sturges' own family reappeared in his life. His sisters had married and moved to other cities, but his recently retired father still lived in New York. Sturges' relations with him had long been perfunctory, but his opinion of his son's divorce could still hurt, and his opinion was that Sturges was making a fool of himself. Sturges' sisters seconded the motion by mail. He got no comfort from that quarter and he was furious about it.

So, as if God were putting him to some kind of awful test, Sturges' battle with Chambers for financial security was fought over a terrain that soon became slippery with disapproval and suspected malice, and for the first time in his business life, Sturges began thinking actively in terms of whom he could trust, of who was loyal to him and who might secretly be working against his and Letia's interests.

This period of Sturges' life was divided into two eras. During the first, all his efforts went outward to meet and master his problem. Even after Mary had welshed on her bargain to go to Reno, he still felt that his friend Falkenstall would bring her lawyer around soon. He was quite willing to settle with Mary for two million dollars, which Letia had told him was exactly the amount Randolph Phelps had given her.

"Anything to get it over with," he told Falkenstall, but he had not yet come to realize how solid was Mary's claim to so much. Quite properly, Falkenstall would not let him consider the possibility of going to Reno himself, with Mary's attorney actively contesting the divorce.

This first period was also the period in which Sturges still had confidence that he could win the world's approval for his marriage by sheer argument and the contagion of his own emotions.

The first era ended when three things happened. All three things came to pass in a single week.

First there was the morning when Chambers finished his bargaining preamble and came down to cases by naming the irreducible minimum for which he would settle, and Falkenstall's later shaking his head and saying, "Damn it, if he has the sense enough to stick to it, we're licked."

Then two nights later there was the request from Parkinson, the oldest of Sturges' directors—the one who was also a director of the Guaranty Trust—to stop off at the Union Club for a drink. Parkinson was not one to beat around the

bush. He sat Sturges on a red leather divan in the corner of the cellar bar and began to talk.

"Now look," he said, "I know how you're going to feel about this, old fellow—and all I can say is I've been through something like this in my own time—but I've been talking it over with some of the other directors and some of your own people (this was not true but Parkinson threw it in for effect). We all feel you ought to think this divorce business over a bit.

"This good old world isn't as hard to get around as you think, Sturges, old fellow. You know, I don't think Mary is the kind of a girl who wouldn't be too upset if you went on knowing Mrs. Phelps. But I mean after all, old fellow, you have two children and you're just beginning to be known, you know—I mean to really important people—and it would be a damned shame if they got the wrong impressions from this divorce business. I wouldn't like it if they got to thinking you weren't a sound chap, old fellow."

Parkinson was not nearly through by the time Sturges was white with rage, and he would really have struck Parkinson as hard as Bishop had once struck him if Parkinson hadn't been an older man, and after all, he was in the man's own club.

The third event that ended the first era was Letia's suddenly interrupting a conversation about something entirely different and saying to Sturges, "Look, darling, I can't take it. I didn't know there was anything I couldn't take but I can't take this waiting. If you had never begun all this business with Mary maybe it would be different—or if I were sure you could finish it quickly. I don't mind what people say. I know that you don't believe that, but I don't. But *you* do and something happens to you when you get worrying about things. I can't stand you when you're like that. You're all I have in the world and I love you more every day we're together, but I can't stand you the way you've been lately, darling. It's your problem, what to do about all this, and I'm going away until you solve it.

"So—" after a pause—"I'm going out to Hollywood in the morning. I'm going to work on my picture until you're through."

It was several evenings after Letia left that Sturges tried to kill himself. He was alone in a hotel room in the St. Regis when the lethal wave of depression struck him. Fortunately, he had called Falkenstall a little earlier in the evening and

asked him to stop by when he got time. Sturges always left the door to his hotel room unlocked to save the nuisance of opening it for bellboys. So Falkenstall was able to walk in, and he arrived just as Sturges was putting one foot across the window sill. He called, "Stop it, Sturges," and Sturges came meekly back into the room and said wearily, "Damn it, why did you come?"

Then Sturges' health began to go and he spent a considerable sum consulting specialists.

Otherwise, the last three months before Mary was divorced were uneventful. Chambers simply wore Sturges Strong down by ignoring him. Sturges got nowhere seeing Mary herself. Mary was now engaged in a crusade to save him from that wretched creature. In the end she only took the train because Chambers was able to convince her that Letia would no longer want her husband after she, Mary, had taken so much of his money away. Chambers tore out a whole fistful of his hair in relief after Mary was finally gone, and he wired friends of his in Reno to keep an eye on her after she got there. He was no longer sure of what Mary would do. Neither was he at all sure that he had not overplayed his hand with Sturges, or that the price he had gotten might not cause the publisher to think better of the whole business.

Such cynical thoughts were very unfair of Chambers. Never once during this period did Sturges even contemplate voluntarily relinquishing a life with Letia. The prospect of marrying Letia grew more wonderful to him as he came to fear again for his own adequacy. She was a superb creature; she had done everything right; he understood even her leaving him for the duration of the divorce and blamed only himself for it—himself and his nemesis, the implacable Chambers.

When the long-distance call finally came through from Reno, Nevada, and it was all over, the whole experience seemed to fade quickly like a bad dream. A few hours after he had awakened from it, Sturges could hardly recall the details and knew only that it had been awful. He talked to Letia several times each day by telephone, but seeing her again, meeting her at the airport, even with press photographers crowding close and the flash of the bulbs and the shoutings of "Hey Mac, kiss her!" and "Turn it this way, Mrs. Phelps!" he knew it was happening all over again to him and that the joy of being with her was almost unbearable.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### *A Little Country Church*

LETIA BEGAN THINKING of herself as Sturges' wife the day after they met; in fact, the first thing that bothered her about Sturges was his taking the formalities of remarrying so hard. Compared to the problems that she had met and handled in her thirty-one years, disposing of Mary wasn't a problem at all, and certainly he had no others.

As soon as Sturges told her how much stock he owned in Facts, Inc., and how much money *Facts* made, she dismissed the whole subject of their financial security. The capital value of the Phelps' settlement had grown to over \$4,000,000. Her down payment in cash, plus the capitalized value of her royalties, from the Long House deal might be worth another three million. She had done better than support herself on the sale of her paintings and the rights to reproduce them, and her earnings from the novel and the movie based on it constituted still another potential addition to her capital. But all that she had accumulated, created, and earned seemed to her small change compared to Sturges' wealth.

There was not merely the fact that *his* stock had a theoretical market value of so many millions. Even more important to her was the fact that Sturges' company had the possibility of earning more money each and every year than she had been able to get together in all her fantastically successful careers.

Letia had been one woman against the world; Facts, Inc., was an organization of vigorous and highly talented young men and women who had evolved a formula for making gold out of waste paper, and what cheaper raw material was there than waste paper and wood pulp and old rags? Facts, Inc.'s capacity to earn money was not dependent, as the earning capacity of Long House had originally been, on any one individual's ideas, or hard-headedness, or drive. And of every dollar that the *Facts* organization accumulated, Sturges owned half.

The satisfaction Letia took in this cannot be overestimated. To begin with, it was of first importance to her that Sturges

be *much* richer than she, and much richer solely as a result of his own efforts. She had to have this assurance to bolster her in her new role of submissive female. It had to be clear to the world—and to her—that there was nothing that Sturges couldn't beat her at.

Over and above that deep satisfaction,—erected on it, as on the firmest of foundations—was the comfort Letia derived from knowing that, with so rich a husband, acquiring money would never again be a factor in her own life. She believed she had never liked accumulating money and that she had continuously resented what seemed to her the insistent necessity for accumulating. She felt that she had accumulated money only because she had been driven to it by the hard necessity of being independent. In none of the acts of accumulation, with the possible exception of her painting for profit, had she found any peace or happiness.

Now, as Letia Strong, she would be free, at last and forever, of the anxieties which had driven her all her life. She would be free to feel and to love, and to be happy in the love of this magnificent man who was making it possible.

As a fundamental corollary, this new happiness was dependent on the magnificent man himself feeling as free of anxiety as she, and that is precisely the point at which Sturges began to fail her.

Letia could not understand Sturges' anxiety in connection with his divorce, and it never occurred to her that he could also be anxious about how Facts, Inc. (and the world that supported it) would receive the news of his marrying her.

This is why, in the beginnings of her bewilderment, she went away, leaving him to dispose of his old life alone. She was sure that his loss of poise was some function of his relationship with his first wife, which she now admitted she did not understand, and that after he had got rid of Mary he would be himself again.

After Sturges' first serious conferences with Falkenstall, he moved, on the advice of counsel, from Letia's penthouse to quarters in an apartment hotel a few blocks away. He was unable, however, to resume his working habits at Facts, Inc. He went there only for an hour or two every few days, which was one reason why his barons got to thinking he was not only about to crown Letia queen but might also be contemplating an abdication in her favor.

To fill their days, Letia introduced Sturges to the world of art, which was new to him, and to café society life, which he had hitherto scorned. But most of the time, whatever they did was no more than a shifting of backdrops against which Sturges might admire her. Then came her three months in California which had seemed interminable. Half of the quality of her longing was just to be with the man with whom she had fallen in love. The other half was to be with him again as she had known him first, proud and self-assured, wanting her and valuing her but not overvaluing her, and free again from the weight of burdens that were too heavy for him to shrug aside.

When Letia got back to New York, Sturges was very thoroughly returned to his original condition. It had taken so long, and had been so difficult to achieve, that finally obtaining his divorce had the same buoyant effect on him that the winning of a more substantial victory would have had. He was made seemingly whole again.

The same happy sense of recovery of something precious flooded through Letia. Sturges was again in command of their life, and she was like a young girl in her excitement over the wedding. In the eyes of God, she felt, it was truly her first marriage. For it, she chose a little country church in a village on the Hudson.

Sturges had got this far at least with his persuasion of the barons at Facts, Inc., to accept Letia as their queen: his man, Fairstreet, now considered the protocol of the marriage his principal responsibility. He listened sensitively for the tone of Letia's emotional state and went forth by telephone and by car to inventory the ministers of the gospel who would marry such publicly divorced characters. He found the Baptists most tolerant. He motored Letia out to meet several of his candidates and she chose the Reverend Smythe after requiring him to read a few paragraphs of the Episcopal marriage service to be sure that he sounded as if he meant what he read. Baptist or no Baptist, she wanted him to read the Episcopal wedding rites which seemed to her socially preferable.

It was very satisfying to Letia to have a servant as able as Johnny Fairstreet to command, particularly one who was backed by the resources of Facts, Inc., and was willing to use them. There was never any question about Fairstreet's ability.

He was smart, suave and worldly, and had the added merit of genuinely liking Letia in addition to admiring her. If he was presently somewhat bewildered by Letia's naïve enthusiasm for everything to do with the wedding—it seemed to him out of character—he accepted and served it as he would have accepted and served the whims of anyone on whom his own well-being was dependent.

What self-respect he had, Fairstreet paid off, as usual, by being privately amused by the eccentricities of the powerful. The thing that amused him most about Letia's second wedding was the irony of her insisting on a little chapel hidden away in the woods and then being so obviously concerned with its being well lit for photographers. The right photographers, he saw, were vital to the success of the wedding—and yet she felt that flash bulbs were out of place in God's house. The little chapel in the woods had to have lines of severest purity and be painted white but when, at Letia's insistence, Fairstreet went shopping with her for the trousseau which Sturges must not see, only the most indelicate intimate garments would do. Every sentimental convention must be respected, but Fairstreet was required to get a certified copy of Sturges' divorce from the lawyers for Letia to examine personally to be sure that no idiot had made a mistake. Fairstreet had to count the pennies in every dollar spent, but the thousands of dollars must, under no circumstances, ever be totaled. Fairstreet had never got so much fun out of life.

Neither, of course, had Letia, by a wide measure, and she felt she had it coming to her. The six months the divorce had taken had drained even her endurance.

It took her some time to realize how thoroughly Sturges had mismanaged handling Mary. Her first instinct had been to assume that he could make no mistakes. In her new state of ecstatic submissiveness she had offered no advice and yet, as the disagreement over terms dragged on, she could not avoid the conclusion that stupidity was at the heart of it. It would have been so simple for her in similar circumstances. There were so many ways to persuade anyone to do anything—when you had the money to pay for the persuading. Her mounting irritation soon came to rest on poor Falkenstall, and she went so far as to suggest to Sturges once that he get himself an attorney who knew how to fight. But she retreated in a hurry when Sturges seemed too grateful for her interest.

She had then, in the early months of her new love, the strongest of instincts not to try to influence the man by whom she was so proud to be dominated. So Sturges let her only helpful suggestion pass for want of its being followed up.

The easy explanation of their troubles—that her man was being betrayed by the lawyer he trusted—did not satisfy Letia for long. Until the divorce business was over, she continued to experience moods of a new kind of depression which came in the wake of each new frustration for her hero. But it never occurred to either of them that the breaches that had been made in the wall of their confidence in one another could never quite be repaired. They had no reservations as they turned themselves at last to the happy task of formalizing their union and of giving the ceremony of their marriage the importance that was due it—the psychological importance to their personal needs, the worldly importance that both of them considered it owed to history.

Once again they reminded themselves that they were not just any two people in love. They were Sturges Strong and Letia Phelps and their times would feel the impact of their union. So at last the Baptist minister with the nice voice said the right Episcopal words in the chaste white church, with the clicking of camera shutters for punctuation. The little audience of carefully chosen celebrities thought their own jealous or ambitious thoughts and Letia Long Phelps became Letia Long Strong.

After the wedding Letia and Sturges flew in the original Lockheed, which Sturges had sentimentally chartered again, from a snow-covered field on Long Island back over the Alleghenies and the plains to New Mexico where it had all begun. They did not stay at the same hotel, although they made a pilgrimage to pay homage to what had happened there. They spent their honeymoon at a ranch which the ever-resourceful Fairstreet had found for them near Santa Fe.

Sturges' actually marrying the woman whom he loved completed the job of his rehabilitation. Letia saw that her husband was now ready for life once more and that in his own good time he would take it apart and mold it nearer to his heart's desire. It could be in his own good time because he was so strong and competent that he could create whatever conditions he thought necessary whenever he pleased.

She abandoned herself to the business of being happily in love.

It was again like the first weeks after they had met, only now there was a structure to their happiness. There was first the joyfulness of everything to do with the marriage itself, and then would come the happy exploration of life as the famous wife of a famous man. It would have what satisfactions she remembered knowing as Randolph Phelps' wife with none of the obligations to form. Letia and Sturges Strong would be above the necessity of being thoughtful of anyone.

Of their life as man and woman, Letia had no complaints. They were in love with each other and it continued to give them great satisfaction just to be in each other's presence. They were often ecstatically happy discovering each other. If the wine of Sturges' new adoration was so sweet as to be a little sickening sometimes, still it was heady stuff and Letia continued to feel that he was a terrific man. If he had faults, she was sure that they must be the kind of faults that are inherent in greatness.

For years Letia had been used to admiration and had come to accept it as naturally as the air she breathed. But Sturges' adulation unsettled even her complacency. When Susan was doing her hair, combing and brushing it in long gentle strokes, Sturges would draw up an armchair and sit watching in what was nothing less than a true trance. It was as if he could not physically move his eyes from her hair. He drank and drank and drank in the sight of her.

When Letia's coiffure and her make-up were complete and she was a finished thing, ready for the world to see, it was obvious that her perfection was too much for Sturges to behold and he would sometimes turn away from her after the briefest look, as if from a sun that shone too bright. Similarly, when she wore nothing at all, she was too much for him and once he actually cried, he was so overwhelmed by her perfection. He seemed to get more enjoyment out of her when she was either drably dressed—now and then she wore an old smock when she painted a little at a picture—or was in the process of changing from one costume to another. Only then did he seem to be able to find any composure and simply be swept off his feet by how lovely she was to him and not wholly devastated. Often, talking with her,

Sturges had to avert his eyes, he was so moved when he looked full into hers.

Letia was more realistic about Sturges' charms. She did not like too handsome men, who always seemed to her effeminate, but love or no love, she was aware that Sturges would be a more impressive physical specimen if he were thinner—he had sat behind a desk for years now. Being practical about such things, she began directing him in private calisthenics each morning and evening, sitting cross-legged on the bed, counting for him while he grunted and the sweat poured from him on the floor. These exercises, and a diet in which love replaced calories, soon had a satisfying result, and Letia came to be very proud of his trimming figure and picked out new clothes for him to show it off well. She dressed him with great care and everyone noted the improvement.

It was pure coincidence that the deadline for making the final decision on whether to start Brennan and Schulberg's new *Fantasy* magazine came while Sturges was still honeymooning. Sturges would not necessarily have picked it as the first of the new worlds he would conquer. Before he met Letia, he had never taken the plans for *Fantasy* seriously; since he had fallen in love, he had never taken anything at Facts, Inc., seriously. He had simply given perfunctory approval of Schulberg's and Brennan's completing their preparations. But now, with spring close at hand, these practical ones had decided that if they did not announce their intentions soon they would have to wait another full year, for it would take six months at least to train the staff and to prepare the public and the trade. Early fall was the only proper season for launching a new magazine.

It was possible that Schulberg and Brennan were also taking advantage of Sturges' frame of mind. One could not conceive of him saying no to anything at that moment. He did not say no. He did not actually even say yes in the sense that he thoughtfully sanctioned the undertaking. He simply said, "Sure, announce anything you please," thinking to himself that in his own good time, if the announcement displeased him, he would disown it.

A week or so later, stretched out in the sun on a steamer chair in the patio, Sturges thought it might amuse Letia to watch him actually in command of his forces, and the memory

of William Randolph Hearst playing tennis while directing twenty-eight newspapers and thirteen magazines—with the fate of multiplied millions of dollars in real estate and a gold mine thrown in—came back to him.

He thought to himself, "I must get some telephone wires strung," recalling that at Wyntoon every few hundred yards along the trails through the woods there was a telephone in a waterproof box, attached to a tree, in case the great man might be walking near by and feel in need of talking to one of his distant executives.

On the ranch at Santa Fe, Sturges had to get up from his steamer chair and go into the living room to call Facts, Inc. He got Brennan and asked him to come out and to bring Schulberg and Fairstreet with him so that they might report in person on *Facts'* affairs.

"Who are we going to see? Sturges—or Letia?" was Fairstreet's reaction when he got the word from Brennan to prepare.

The question was not perceptive. It was farthest from Letia's mind or mood that she should concern herself with her husband's means of livelihood. But when Sturges told her that he was thinking of sending for them—that he thought what they had to say might interest and amuse her—her natural curiosity about how any undertaking was managed was aroused. She was happy to acquiesce. The few shop conversations she had been a party to before the marriage had been dull in extreme, but the idea of being present at the creation of an important new national magazine was intriguing.

Nevertheless, Letia was surprised to find that she did not resent the intrusion on their honeymoon. Actually, she looked forward to the gathering of Sturges' chieftains. As to her own role, she had no question. She was the great Sturges Strong's wife. That then seemed enough for any woman, even herself, and it did not occur to her that part of the reason she looked forward to Brennan's coming was that her native energy was again beginning to be in need of an outlet.

*The Royal Court*

LETIA APPROVED OF almost all the plans that had been made for *Fantasy*, but she had fault to find with the dummies they brought; they were not chic enough. She made a number of intelligent contributions, suggesting how the magazine might be made to have more appeal for women. Both Brennan and Schulberg were impressed; Fairstreet had told them what to expect if Letia was in form. She had never been in better. The threesome had arrived by plane about the tenth day of the honeymoon and were with Sturges and Letia almost all the rest of the month. They broke their stay only to fly back to New York to fetch more facts and figures and to have some of Letia's ideas translated into layouts and captions. The ranch house was a rambling U-shaped building, and the three visitors were easily taken care of in one wing.

The whole episode of the honeymoon of the great ones and the final planning of *Fantasy* was a curious idyll. On the terrace on which they breakfasted alone, the three men could look across the patio through the mesquite trees with their fragile leaves and just make out the gyrating form of their employer doing his morning setting-up exercises under his new wife's directions. They could hear Letia's voice, clear and melodious, counting out the beats—"One, two—down, up—one, two—down, up." Then a little while later they would hear the lovers splashing in the pool on the other side of the house, shouting gaily at one another.

After a while, one of the Mexican houseboys would come and knock at their doors and announce that Mr. and Mrs. Strong would like to see them. Usually the threesome found the Strong's back on their own terrace. Sturges would be stretched out on a wicker chaise longue, in a bathrobe of some bright satin. Letia would be in a smaller canvas chair at his right, drying in her sleek black bathing suit, her damp blonde hair decorating her shoulders. Usually she would be knitting to keep her hands occupied.

The three executives entered as if upon a somewhat in-

formal court, bowing their good mornings and seating themselves, at the royal nod, in the three camp chairs which had been placed for them in a semicircle below the throne. Sturges did not rise to greet them, but both Sturges and Letia smiled warmly and the day began. One or the other of the visitors would recite, sometimes running on for an hour or two of detail, going in, say, to all the nuances of establishing *Fantasy* as a medium for cosmetic advertising, or the availability of photographers who could hold their own with Harry Luce's best. In the beginning, the three men had been shy and had taken for granted that the groom would want to hear as little as he needed to reassure himself that they had been good boys. They were prepared to back themselves out of the presence at the first sign that they were overstaying their invitation. But it was soon obvious to Fairstreet, who was more aware of such things, that they filled some need in Sturges' and Letia's existence and were expected to be ready to go on indefinitely, like story-tellers to a prince and princess.

In his new role of monarch, Sturges was altogether benign. The old sharpness of his criticisms was gone. He lay listening dreamily to their plans of conquest, only occasionally interrupting with a question that was obvious even for him.

Not so Letia. She was very much alive as her needles clicked. This was a whole new world to her and she was drinking in knowledge of it, not for any particular purpose that she understood but because at last her active mind was again being exercised. It actually relaxed her to use her faculties thus because the situation had no conflict in it for her. She was well within the role that was natural for her at this time—the role of the great man's wife. She experienced no sense of competing with him because this was his venture and these were his servants. For once, Sturges had been completely right about her reactions when he had felt that the attendance of the courtiers would please her.

All five of them always lunched together and at lunch the roles were reversed and the three were the audience, listening mostly to Letia, who was a livelier conversationalist than Sturges. Then the three would be sent along to play and Sturges and Letia would do something active like riding horse-back together or swimming again; but before dinner they would be called a second time, for cocktails in the patio.

After Sturges had had several cocktails, the talk was likely

to soar to a very high altitude, and Sturges would explain to them why Roosevelt should be succeeded by a Republican president, how to settle the war in Europe without American bloodshed, how to use America's great economic power as a political weapon, how Russia's Communists could be alienated from their faith and turned again to respectable capitalism. They had never heard Sturges express opinions on such large subjects before. Previously, his had always been a reporter's approach to the world's problems. But now they saw how changed he was, and what an important expansion had taken place in his ego.

Schulberg wondered where Strong was getting the facts on which to make his judgments since he had laughingly told them that he doubted if he had really read the papers half a dozen days since he had met Letia. Brennan thought that Sturges did not take his own ideas seriously; he was simply showing off to his bride. Fairstreet, whose security was most dependent on his understanding of what was going on inside Sturges, wasn't sure. He now felt more at home with his new boss, Letia, than with his old boss, Sturges.

During the dinnertime conversation on larger subjects, Letia usually sat silent, her clear blue eyes looking admiringly at her husband.

Actually Sturges was conscious of no particular change in his attitude toward life. He just felt very good all the time, and when he had a few drinks, expansive. After Letia showed herself so visibly pleased by hearing about *Fantasy*, he shrugged away the doubts he still had as to its chance of success and even said to himself, "Actually, it doesn't matter if it's a commercial failure. There's prestige in bringing out a new magazine." If that explanation of his compliant mood did not satisfy him, he thought happily that it might be a wonderful thing for Letia to play with anyway. It couldn't cost over a half a million dollars and Facts, Inc., was well heeled.

But when he asked Letia whether she would like to run *Fantasy*, she was noncommittal. She had several private reservations. Did Sturges *really* want his wife in the office with him? Did she herself *really* want to be there? She perceived that the new venture would require an enormous effort. Would it be worth making? As far as she could understand herself, she was still purringly happy.

With so many questions which she was not yet ready to answer, Letia gave her husband the wrong impression. She let him think it was a matter of no concern to her whereas in truth she had already begun to be involved emotionally.

Despite her negative reaction to her husband's proposal, Letia had been playing with the idea of being the mistress of her husband's new creation ever since the three executives had arrived. Before that, her daydreams of herself as Sturges' wife had had no form. But now they were taking shape, composing themselves into a picture of herself as one of his first assistants.

Thinking about the new publication, actually spending most of her days living in a medium of talk about it, had got Letia interested for the first time in the whole phenomenon of publishing. She recalled her irritation whenever she had been given a bad press. Reporters had been important to her for years. She wondered why she had never thought before of getting herself into a position from which she could dictate to them instead of having to court their favor. She also thought that it must be an even greater satisfaction to give publicity than to receive it. *Fantasy*, she concluded, with its photographers and its writers who would belong to her, would be great fun.

Letia did not phrase it in these terms because she was unconscious of them, but her taking charge of the new publication appealed to her also because she was a natural leader. Orlando would have recognized its attraction to the general in her.

When Letia finally answered her doubts concerning what the new role might do to her relationship with Sturges, she made her decision. She answered her doubts by reminding herself that everything she did as *Fantasy's* editor would be done *for* Sturges and under his divine guidance. The decision she made was to accept the post of editor and publisher of the unborn magazine.

Had Letia been in any other situation than that in which she found herself—the beloved wife of the man in absolute control of the venture—at this point she would have translated her decision into positive action. But being fixed as she was, and Sturges having made the original suggestion to her, she simply took for granted that when the time came he

would again ask her pleasure and that at this time she would be happily enthusiastic.

The trouble was that Sturges never came to ask her.

After they got back to New York, the first months passed in the happy confusion of establishing themselves physically. It had been a long time since Letia had had the responsibility of managing a rich man's establishment. She had been horrified at the simplicity in which Mary Strong had permitted her famous husband to live, and she set about at once to rectify this state of affairs.

"I don't know what Mary was thinking about, letting you go on living in that wretched little apartment," Sturges was told. "It couldn't have been worse for your business, you know."

For the betterment of his business, then, Letia moved them first into a floor that was scraped together in the Ritz Towers at Park Avenue and 57th Street—a makeshift arrangement—and thence into a more becoming duplex much further up Park Avenue. Even with the almost full-time service of Fairstreet—and the enthusiastic co-operation of decorators and real estate men—the acquiring, outfitting, and opening of these establishments took all the time Letia could spare from being with her bridegroom.

The immediate coming of summer complicated the business. There was then a house to be rented at East Hampton on Long Island. Extra cars had to be bought; more servants had to be engaged. To meet Letia's standards, the whole had to be organized so well that it could be put in charge of a full-time executive so that she need no longer concern herself with dull management problems.

She tried to get Towers to leave the Phelps but, much as he loved Letia, he had been with old Mrs. Phelps too long to make a change. He did, however, find her a young Englishman whose name was Smithers and who was everything an executive butler should be; but it took Smithers time to find out how to please Letia and her husband.

For all these reasons, Letia's first reaction to Sturges' postponement of her appointment as editor was one of relief. She wanted to get this all behind her, and in order, before taking over her new responsibilities. But when October came and the famous first issue of *Fantasy* appeared on the stands,

she realized that she had been hurt by having been left out of the starting line-up.

The birth of *Fantasy* was an exciting event, too. Sturges himself had had little to do with preparation for it. He was conforming more and more to the Hearstian pattern of managing his affairs from wherever he was most comfortable, and the final form of *Fantasy* had been beaten out in printers' composing rooms and over layout tables that were lit through the night. But the day before *Fantasy* came out, Sturges had spent at the office discussing Vol. I, No. 1 which had just come from the printer's. That night, he had returned to Letia to chuckle, "Well, there's nothing else in the world quite like it, but it's expensive and I don't think they'll keep more than a few hundred thousand in the long run. Schulberg's still betting on a million, but I think the rest of them agree with me that as far as Facts, Inc., is concerned, *Fantasy's* a luxury item. And twice a week is a lot of times to come out."

As late as noon of the day the magazine appeared, Sturges had not even called the office to hear how *Fantasy* was being received by the public. The reason they were not calling Sturges from the office was that they already knew that the news was so good they could afford to let it pile up until it was overwhelming.

Actually, the telegrams had begun to come in the night before from those distributors who had broken the release date and had already put the magazine on sale on a few railway depot stands. A week's fanfare on the radio had awakened the public's interest. The first few thousands of copies melted away in minutes. By morning of the official date of sale, the first buyers must have spread the word. Schulberg had bet on his own optimism by putting out a full million copies. The public bought them as fast as they could be stacked on the news stands.

At 11 A.M., Morrissey of the American News Company had called Schulberg to ask him to put Vol. I, No. 2 back on the presses. He said he could sell every copy of the next issue they could print. Schulberg told him nothing doing, that they were already starting to run some forms on the third issue. Besides, he preferred a sell-out the whole first week.

Schulberg's partner, Brennan, saw to it that *Fantasy's* first-time advertisers had Morrissey's news within the hour. Brennan had only guaranteed advertisers a modest 300,000 readers.

Now, on the first issue at least, they were getting close to a million news stands' sales, and a torrent of subscriptions was flooding in.

At 1 P.M. of the first day, Schulberg and Brennan indulged themselves. They put on their hats and instead of going to luncheon they took a cab up to the Strongs' apartment, armed with a briefcase stuffed with telegrams and telephone messages.

They did not wait for the new butler to open the door. They beat a tattoo on it with their fists and, carried away by the thunder they awoke, they both began howling like banshees. When the startled Smithers opened the door at last, they pushed him aside and stood in the hallway shouting, "Letia! Sturges! Hey, you people! Wake up! You're in! You're famous!"

Letia and Sturges were in the drawing room with a representative from W. & J. Sloane's considering some samples he had brought for new draperies. When Brennan and Schulberg were quiet long enough for them to hear where their employers were, they rushed in. Brennan had the briefcase. He took it by the bottom and, unfastening the latch, shook it over his head. A snow storm of yellow and white papers fluttered down.

"Read 'em! Read 'em and weep!" he bellowed.

Letia said, "Here now, children, children! *Please* stop it. Whatever are you talking about?"

Brennan said, "We've struck oil, sister!" and Schulberg was inspired to throw his arms around her and kiss her.

"We were sold out by noon," Schulberg said. "It's the greatest thing in the history of the magazine business. *Life's* done for and we're going to have more circulation than *The Reader's Digest*. It's all true. It's all here"—his gesture encompassed the papers that were spread out on the floor.

Then there was a great asking of what and where and when from Sturges, who temporarily forgot all about the augustness of his position and questioned them as excitedly as he would have when he was a boy. The man from Sloane's tiptoed away; nobody noticed his going.

Of course Letia was very much a part of it, but it is one thing to be very much a part of the celebration of a family victory and it would have been another to have been the author of the victory itself. If she had spent the last six months as Sturges' lieutenant instead of as Sturges' housekeeper, this

would have been *her* celebration. She would have been the one who had rushed in to startle them all with the good news. She looked at her husband and his eyes were shining. He was excited and happy, and he was, for the first moment since they had met that night in Albuquerque, wholly oblivious of her. She not only felt hurt; she now felt abandoned and that she was the victim of a great injustice.

It was not the way it should have been.

That night alone with Sturges she had to say to him, "Myron and Joe act as if *Fantasy* belonged to them. I wonder if it's smart to leave them in charge, Sturges?"

Sturges said, "Gee, why not?" and then, "You think maybe it's such a big thing I ought to go down and watch it myself for a while?"

"I could go down and watch it for you," said Letia and stopped herself in a gesture of biting her lip.

"No-o-o, you don't have to do anything like that, darling. But, by golly, it's quite a thing, taking 130,000,000 people by storm."

"But can they do it again? You told me it was just curiosity."

"No, no," said Sturges. "There's no doubt about it. There's never been anything like this."

"You don't think it will go to their heads, Sturges?" Letia persisted. Her question brought Sturges a little closer to earth.

"I'll go down there tomorrow, darling," he said.

Sturges did go down to Facts, Inc., the next day, but the idea that his wife had been trying to convey to him did not get through until several weeks later. The first weeks after the oil began to flow from *Fantasy's* gusher seemed wholly to distract him and he spent all his time at the office, talking and talking, making so much talk that he could hardly repeat the gist of it to Letia when he saw her in the evening. But finally it did dawn on him that her attitude toward the magazine had changed, and it even penetrated vaguely that she would enjoy having some part in it.

Up until the day before *Fantasy* appeared, nothing would have satisfied Sturges more than the idea that Letia could be interested, in a practical working sense, in any one of his ventures. He understood it as anxiety on her part to be even closer to him. He would have moved any or all of his executives out to make room for her, never thinking twice about

repercussions. But the moment when he would have reacted so was gone now. It had gone because of the things he had learned about the nature of *Fantasy's* fantastic triumph during the first weeks of his return to his desk.

What he had learned was that *Fantasy's* success was so enormous that it had more than a possibility of making Facts, Inc., far and away the most profitable publishing property in America. It had also the possibility, if anything went wrong with it—if there was the slightest hesitancy in its earning capacity—of bankrupting its parent.

What Letia did not know, completing the last of her preparations for a gracious life for them, was that the whole foundation of her husband's fortune had been unseated by the very violence of his new success.

To capitalize on the demand for *Fantasy*, tens of millions of new dollars would be required for presses and paper, in a hasty expansion. After these commitments had been made, it might even be a matter of years before it could be known for certain that the commitment was really justified.

These things Letia did not know because she knew no more about her husband's business than she had learned listening for play on her honeymoon; but every executive at Facts, Inc., knew them. But what not even Sturges' most knowing executives realized was the extent to which their founder and president was vulnerable to even temporary adversity.

By the time Sturges caught on to the fact that Letia would like to become an editor of *Fantasy*, it was too late for him to think of that undertaking as a plaything, too late for him, he felt, to trust it to anyone but himself.

This was why Letia was presently to find herself not merely without a new career but also without even her old one of being Sturges' full-time preoccupation. At the very moment when she at last completed the work that was so routine to her—organizing an appropriate establishment in which Sturges could live with her—she found that she was living in it practically alone.

For this, Letia blamed the incompetence of Schulberg, Brennan, and Sturges' other executives in being unable to manage their new magazine for themselves. Her obsession became so intense that Sturges could not understand it. She was almost savage when she spoke of them. One day she

even asked Sturges' chief assistants to her apartment in Park Avenue and there she spent several hours telling them how little she thought of them. Then, hurt and furious, she turned savagely back to the now thankless business of being Sturges' wife.

*Fantastic Fantasy*

THE FRENCH WOULD have described the success of *Fantasy* as a *succes fou*. *Fantasy's* success was so enormous, and instantaneous, and undreamt of that it was literally foolish. Its dimensions were so colossal that it seemed the creature of a magic that touched everyone concerned with foolishness.

Brennan sat in his carpeted office, his feet on the desk and an opened whisky bottle on the telephone table beside him, and laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks at the way the orders for advertising space in *Fantasy* were coming in. He thought it was the funniest thing that had ever been done in business when he issued orders that all his salesmen were to stop calling on agencies and sit in their offices instead, to man the telephones so that they could keep track of the orders that were choking the lines.

Schulberg, who had doubled in brass as editor and circulation manager, was in hysterics, he thought it so silly that now that he had no circulation problem, in the accepted sense, he had to turn over the editorial reins in order to concentrate on bringing order out of chaos in the circulation department. Within forty-eight hours, he had more mail in his office than his old staff could have handled in three months. He had three men out combing the employment agencies for subscription clerks. He was renting loft space to house them, drafting proudly apologetic letters for them to send to thousands of people whose subscriptions couldn't possibly be filled.

Overnight, *Facts*, *The Knowing Weekly* was a stepchild, and those of its executives who had not been drafted to help out on *Fantasy* wandered about in a daze, like older children when the new baby is brought home.

The whole operation did indeed need an executive at its head, and Sturges would have had no choice but to return to work even if he, too, had not been caught up in the whirlwind. He was relatively less carried away than the others, possibly because he was more at home in fairyland, having

been a resident there for some time with Letia. But no one can say that even he behaved normally.

For all his business life, Sturges had acted cautiously, had argued and felt his way through every decision. He had confidence only in what he had personally mastered. He never played hunches; he was without flair. His greatest value was always as the balance wheel, as a heavy, ponderous reservoir of momentum. But now his reactions were spontaneous; he made the most daring decisions on the briefest of testimony from other men.

The problem that faced him was how to handle a demand for millions of copies of *Fantasy* every three or four days, with facilities which had been prepared only for the production and distribution of a few hundred thousand. The million and a half of Vol. I, No. 1 had taken two weeks to manufacture in advance and to store up for the grand opening. Now Facts, Inc., was expected to put several times that many *Fantasys* on sale twice weekly.

Difficult enough!—but only the beginning: not only was there the public's demand for millions of each issue of *Fantasy* but, in addition, there was the trade's insistence that Sturges sell an unlimited number of pages of advertising in each issue. Schulberg and Brennan had planned issues of at most sixty-four pages. Brennan now said his department could fill twice that many every time *Fantasy* came out.

To deny these demands meant risking alienation of both trade and public—and an open invitation to competitors to take the market *Fantasy* had so sensationally created. Yet even to try to meet them meant committing Facts, Inc., to an expansion involving tens of millions. Whole forests would have to be bought to insure an adequate supply of paper, the output of many mills would have to be secured, an army of presses marshaled.

The Sturges of even a few years earlier might have handled this embarrassment of opportunity by committing his organization to a minimum of capital investment. He would have supplied only a fraction of the demand. He would probably have said that he preferred to build solidly; he would certainly have counted the cost a thousand times before agreeing to anything that could endanger his security.

Now, however, he seemed the easiest boss in the world to talk out of a million dollars. He who had denied the possi-

bility of more than half a million permanent circulation for *Fantasy* on the very eve of its appearance now seemed at home with the most flamboyant of projections. Five million, ten million, on up past *The Reader's Digest* with the audience it won't sell to advertisers, to fifteen million, to the twenty or more millions that Hearst reaches with his newspaper and his magazine readers combined, a new magazine audience of the dimensions of the audience presumed for the most successful coast-to-coast radio programs—why not? asked Sturges.

And if this was the true forecast, what was wrong with committing the company to buying out a paper-making company for \$20,000,000? And if the owner wanted \$25,000,000 for what was worth only \$20,000,000, why haggle? Buy it, quick!

The first week after the bonanza, Schulberg had the good fortune to get hold of a plant that could be quickly converted to handle Facts, Inc.'s new semi-weekly. On an emergency basis, it expanded successfully to an indicated output of three million 120-page copies of each issue by Vol. I, No. 12. Beyond that, trade and public would both have to wait.

Sturges redoubled his efforts to see that they would not have to wait long, no matter what it cost. By the time he was through, the bill was staggering.

There is nothing more interesting to the man whose own fortune is involved, or duller to a bystander, than the balance sheet and income statement of a corporation. Sturges always insisted that his own statements be translated into English for him by the treasurer to be sure the bookkeepers were playing no tricks with their technical language. As a matter of record, Facts, Inc.'s statements were always of a peculiar clarity, for the very reason that the president and chairman of its board had such difficulty in visualizing what the accountants were trying to say about how the company was doing. But by three months after *Fantasy's* first appearance, even the least statistically minded editor could have seen from the figures how much the new success was costing.

The commitments that Sturges had approved were mortgages on the future—the batteries of new presses which he had ordered (at something over \$600,000 a press) would take at least a year to build. In the meantime, however, plenty was happening to Facts, Inc.'s immediate financial standing, and all of it temporarily bad. For the second time Facts, Inc.,

was sweating out its advertising rates catching up with a magazine's circulation.

One must remember that a rapid success in the magazine publishing business sometimes involves a period when heavy losses must be sustained. This is because the publication contracts to sell advertising at, say, \$1,000 a page, and then the actual cost of producing and distributing the page mounts to several times that. This phenomenon occurs when a publication has announced rates based on a given circulation a year in advance, and has thereafter been successful in acquiring many times as many readers as it anticipated. To supply the demand from the public, it must print hundreds of thousands or even millions of copies, the advertising in which is literally being given away. The cost of manufacturing the advertising for the excess circulation is on the house.

In the meantime, of course, the magazine itself is being sold to the public at a loss. The advertising will one day make this up, but during the period of initial growth, the publisher is being caught two ways.

It is very rare that this curious business works a real hardship because everybody knows that the publisher's difficulties are temporary and if he hasn't the money in the bank, it is not difficult for him to borrow it. The rate at which *Facts*, Inc., was losing money during the first year of *Fantasy's* success, however, presented special problems. In the first place, *Fantasy's* losses were not merely offsetting all the profits from *Facts*—they were incurring a net deficit. And the net deficit was huge. In the second place, *Fantasy* was something really new under the sun and no one could be sure that its success was not a flash in the pan. Thoughtful investment counsels, considering the purchase of stock in *Facts*, Inc., reminded themselves that several times in the history of twentieth-century publishing in America, new publications had achieved instant and extraordinary popularity only to be dropped by a fickle public before they were many years old.

*Facts'* stock had been listed on the Curb Exchange for a number of years. Word of *Fantasy's* first success had sent it skyrocketing. But *Fantasy* had not sold half a dozen issues to the public before the stock in the parent company began to drop again—on estimates of how much *Fantasy's* success would cost. The competition was quick to seize on the slightest signs of weakness. The first advertisers who flocked

to buy space in *Fantasy* were, of course, the most opportunistic and the least conservative. The big established advertisers preferred to wait, bargain or no bargain, until they were sure that *Fantasy* was in the field to stay.

The able salesmen of Sturges' competitors now pointed to the descent of his stock as an indication that the whole venture was unstable. A thoughtfully manufactured rumor began to spread that the public was already beginning to tire of *Fantasy's* frothy fare and that in Facts, Inc.'s offices they were faking the figures. It was a canard, but it served the purpose of keeping the bellwether advertisers (who would eventually make or break *Fantasy* as an advertising medium) out of the book just so many months longer.

The value of stock in Facts, Inc., continued to decline.

During the beginning of this decline, the way Sturges was conducting his business only made things worse. His directors, who had at first gone about patting each other on the back, had now begun to be seriously worried by their president's cavalier attitude. The conservatives who had worried about the effects of his marriage decided that their notions had been sound. They could not put it in words, but they believed that divorcing his wife and running off with that blonde had done something to Sturges. His attitude wasn't the same. Whereas before he had been respectful to them in discussing the company's affairs, even though he had the power to outvote them, now he was more inclined to laugh when they asked him tentatively where all the money was going to come from to see *Fantasy* through the crucial year.

"If worst comes to worst," he told one of them, "we just won't pay any bills until we can get the new rates in force." They went away from such talks with him shaking their heads, and with what presently seemed to be good reason. News of the first bill for paper that Sturges told his treasurer to ignore got around the trade fast. It brought the representatives of most of the other companies who supplied Facts, Inc., with its raw materials to the doors of Facts, Inc.'s principal bankers, asking pointed questions.

It was one morning not long after that that Sturges found himself receiving the president of the largest bank with which he did business, the bank that had arranged his own large borrowings. This gentleman had with him a small slip of paper which he took carefully out of his wallet and laid on

the desk between Sturges and himself. On this little slip of paper was noted the amount which Sturges owed personally, together with the number of shares of Facts, Inc., which the bank held as collateral, the value of the stock at the time of the loan, and the value to which it had now been depressed.

The measure of the alteration in Sturges' attitude toward such matters as bank loans and assets is that, whereas a few years earlier they conditioned his whole life, at the time the president of the bank called on him he had actually forgotten how much money he had borrowed to finance his divorce. The whole episode of Chambers' hold-up had been blotted out of his memory by the successive triumphs of his marriage to Letia and *Fantasy's* fantastic appeal to the public.

The banker's little slip of white paper was eloquent enough, but he had a few other things to say to Sturges. He said them in the friendliest of fashions, as befits a banker speaking to a very rich man whose possible bankruptcy is by no means a *fait accompli*. He told Sturges that he could not help but observe, in looking over Sturges' account, that although upwards of a million dollars a year was being paid into it as a result of dividends which the directors of Facts, Inc., had declared before the advent of *Fantasy*, Sturges' withdrawals to meet current expenses were barely being covered. As a banker, he could hardly ignore the fact that the directors of Facts, Inc., could no longer continue to pay out any dividends at all until the new property was over the hump.

The color rose from under Sturges' well-tailored collar, spread through his cheeks until they were embarrassingly red; then the blood ebbed from his face and left him unnaturally pale. His caller observed these symptoms, as a banker must, and decided that the situation was worse than he had expected to find it.

He said, "You know, this is a very large loan we've made you. I was criticized by my own directors for backing it. Of course it isn't something I worry about personally, but I shall be on the carpet about it if you can't help me out."

"What do you mean, 'help you out'?" asked Sturges grimly.

"I know they would feel a lot better—the bank's directors, I mean—if you could put up a little more collateral for the loan. I would say about two million more. I expect you'd rather not sell any of your stock in the company at this time—although of course that would help."

The banker now observed a kind of glassing over of the expression in Sturges' eyes and he decided that he had gone far enough for the moment. He also decided that it would be a good thing if he looked up a few of the directors of Facts, Inc., and found out if they were aware of how far the president of their company had extended himself.

He said, "Well, I just thought I would go over these things with you, Mr. Strong. Perhaps after you've had a chance to think them over you'll get in touch with me."

As soon as he returned to the bank, the worried president got in touch with Falkenstall, whom he knew to be not only the company's lawyer and an active director but also Sturges' personal attorney. Thus, for a second time in his career, Falkenstall was put on the spot by Sturges Strong's affairs. Every single one of the other directors of the company was in some way important either to Falkenstall personally or to the august firm of Wood, Wickersham, Root, Sullivan and Taft, in which he hoped soon to become a senior partner.

Falkenstall was much more aware than Sturges of the latter's condition, but he had taken it for granted that Sturges knew what he was doing with the company's expansion. After the banker's call it did not take him long to find out that it was going to be a near thing whether the company would be able to pull through the next six months without getting hold of some very large sums of new money, and who could guess what the terms might be. Everywhere he burrowed for *facts*, he was met with a counterfire of "if's." *If Fantasy's* circulation holds up, *if* there is no business recession, *if* we don't get drawn into the war, and *if* the advertising isn't then limited as it was in the last war, *if* the suppliers have confidence in Strong and his paper, *if, if, if . . .* he could get no real reassurance from anyone.

Falkenstall felt his choice was between two courses. He was reasonably certain that he could reassure Sturges' bankers if he chose. He had only to tell them that in his opinion *Facts'* directors would not let the company down. They were all rich men. Without committing them, Falkenstall could represent their attitude to the bank as anything he pleased because it was true that, in their optimistic moods, they still had confidence that *Fantasy* would survive to make them richer than ever. As a group they were not entirely without loyalty to a company that had earned them a great deal of money.

Falkenstall was known to be Strong's most nearly intimate associate—he could himself create optimism among the directors by getting an optimistic picture from Sturges and passing it out amongst them, in strictest confidence. He could even tell them that Sturges hoped the stock would stay down on the market until insiders could buy shares from the weaker of heart. It was something he knew he could do well, and if everything turned out all right, he would be a hero. The strongest of *Facts'* directors would buy stock on the implications of his sales talk and, once it had started up, the boom would be on again.

That would be one course.

On the other hand, if *Fantasy's* circulation faltered and its creditors foreclosed, Falkenstall felt his reputation might never recover from his having cast his lot with Sturges. The directors would never forgive him for having put his loyalty to Sturges ahead of his hard judgment of the risks involved.

In the end, he sought middle ground. He chose the two directors who had always been friendliest to Sturges and he laid the whole situation before them. They were very sad to hear that the young man who had made so much money for them was in trouble and they could hardly believe their ears when Falkenstall told them the truth about how much it had cost Sturges to buy a divorce from his wife.

The last straw was when Falkenstall let slip that Sturges and Letia were spending so much money that the bankers seemed as worried about Sturges' cash balance as about his huge loan. With a number of tut-tuts and a considerable shaking of heads, they concluded that they had no choice, in the company's interest as well as in their own, but to take the situation in hand. If, in order to protect its loan, the bank were ever to sell Sturges out, there would be no telling what such a dumping of shares might do to the value of the stock. Besides, it was a grave question whether the destiny of a property that was potentially worth so many, many millions of dollars should be left in the hands of a man who seemed so completely out of touch with financial realities.

It was, they finally reasoned themselves into agreement, only in Sturges' best interests that they remove him from control. Once they owned Sturges' stock, and had settled with his bankers for him, they could put him again on a sound footing, as the hired executive of the company he founded.

If *Fantasy* worked out, they could afford to pay him several hundred thousand dollars a year as the company's general manager, even after putting a new president in over him to keep a watchful eye on the interests of the stockholders.

After they had the proposition all packaged, Sturges' directors went to the bank with it and explained in confidence that they were prepared to take Strong's stock off the bank's hands, paying—of course—somewhat less than the market for it. This would liquidate Sturges' loan, and might even leave him a sizable balance.

The stock that they acquired would be divided amongst the directors, who had previously owned only a minority of the company, and they wanted the banker to understand clearly that this move was no reflection on Sturges' abilities as a publisher. They explained that it was the intention of the new controllers of the company to continue Strong's employment, at a considerably higher salary than he had ever paid himself when he was in control.

The president of the bank gave a banker's equivalent of a long low whistle.

He said, "You know, of course, that the bank can't enter into any agreement with you. It all depends upon the action of the stock in the market as to whether we feel we would have to take advantage of your offer to buy. And, of course, we would have to give Strong a chance to pay off the loan some other way."

The directors said, "Of course, of course," and then asked how much further the stock would have to drop before the bank would feel it had no choice.

The banker glanced at a notation the cashier had prepared for him. He said, "It's down again today. I'm afraid that if there were sales at thirty points lower we would have to tell Strong that we had had an offer for his stock, and that we would have to take it unless he was prepared to meet our demand for more collateral at once. We couldn't afford to delay at all."

"Of course you couldn't," said the directors, who were now faced with the necessity of deciding how frank they should be with Strong himself. They put it up to Falkenstall to do the talking.

Falkenstall did not follow their instructions literally. He had been told to tell Sturges that it was the banker who had

brought the matter up, asking if the directors would underwrite the stock Sturges had up as collateral, and that the directors had formed a pool for the purpose of purchasing this stock, to protect everyone concerned. Falkenstall was to let this version of what had gone on sink in before proceeding further. Sturges must not feel that he was being pushed by anything except the inexorable laws of banking. He must not feel betrayed, and he must also not feel that there was anything anyone could do about it—if the stock continued to go down *and* he was unable to save himself by his own efforts.

Falkenstall doubted whether Sturges would remain intact under the impact of even this much grim reality, and he decided that he himself would appear in a better light if he assumed the role of telling all to Sturges—of, in effect, double-crossing the pool by revealing the operation as a plot to take control of the company away from Sturges. Then, however it came out, Falkenstall's own position was foolproof. If the directors took over the company, he was one of them. If, by some miracle, Sturges saved himself, Sturges would remain in debt to him for the advance information on what was afoot.

Falkenstall's crucial meeting with Sturges took place only a week after the banker's visit to the offices of Facts, Inc. During the week that had intervened, Sturges had almost succeeded in denying to himself the implications of the banker's visit. The process was one of simply refusing to believe that it could be happening to him. To have believed that he was once again in danger of extinction, as he had felt himself the first years after Allen Bishop had deserted him, would have been to have denied everything that had happened since he had set out on the fateful trip he had made to the West Coast. The man that he was when he had met Letia, the man who could afford to dispose of his wife and children in order to get the woman he loved, no matter what the cost, the man who had married Letia and made her his queen, the man whose armies were in the act of concluding the most sensational victory in history over their adversaries—the man who was all these things simply did not exist at all if he could be undone by a few scratches in pencil on a memorandum pad.

But after Falkenstall had come and gone, Sturges knew at last that indeed it might be true, that there might well be no such man but only the illusion of such a man.

Falkenstall had not spoken to him in his office. He had

taken Sturges to a private dining room in the Union Club and had asked the waiters to leave the room before he had spoken. He had talked for a long time and earnestly. He was just as perceptive as the banker, but he noticed no symptoms whatever of embarrassment in Sturges. Instead, he saw only a man whose face was frozen into a hard mask. He had never been frightened of Sturges before. By the time his monologue was over, he found he *was* frightened, there was so cruel and savage a look in Sturges' eyes.

Falkenstall had no comments whatever to take back to the directors because Sturges had heard him all the way through without making a single remark and only asked questions like, "And then?" and "And after that?" Finally, just before they parted, Falkenstall had brought himself to ask what Sturges was going to do about it. Sturges had said very simply, "I don't know." At the door of the club, he had walked away without any final salutation.

After he left Falkenstall, Sturges walked west to Central Park and sat alone on a bench around the corner from the 72nd Street entrance. He thought hard, for the first time in a great many years. Whether he had acknowledged it to himself or not, the banker's conversation had prepared him for what Falkenstall had said and this time he was not suffering from shock. His head was very clear. He was able to let his imagination fasten on the picture of himself as he would be if these people who were his enemies succeeded.

After a little while he thought, "This is what they once tried to do to old man Hearst—when *he* was out on a limb."

He was able, even accurately, to appraise the new magazine's prospects of success. He concluded soberly that it would not fail, that this crisis was a thing of the moment. But he did not blink the fact that before the moment passed it might destroy him.

Then, with all the facts clear in his mind, he leaned back against the bench and spread his arms out wide and let himself relax. Relaxing so, the whole reality, of which these things were only parts, came gradually to him—the truth that he had lost in the excitement of the last few months, the knowledge that he no longer had to face these things alone. He experienced again the sense of being in love and loved. The warm feeling of it spread through him and finally he thought con-

sciously, "This is the truth and *the other* is the illusion. This is the truth: nothing can touch us."

Without any effort, he saw clearly that the whole high-handed attempt to hold him up and to take away from him the company that belonged to him was a piece of the most arrant foolishness—on his enemies' part.

The bank was concerned because the only security he had had on which to borrow the money to pay off Mary was stock in his own company. Well, to hell with his assets! What they forgot was that Letia must have more money in her own name than all that he owed to the bank. They thought they could squeeze him, did they? Why, Letia could walk into the bank tomorrow and knock their whole silly scheme into a cocked hat. And God damn, what he'd do to them then! He'd fire them, one by one, as directors of the company, and he'd hire Bowery bums and put them in their seats to make an object lesson of it. He'd see to it that from this day forth there would be only one house target for Facts, Inc.'s editors—the list of names of the men who had conspired against him and who were now to be crucified in public.

"The whole thing is love," he thought. "That's what they didn't reckon on. That's what they don't know anything about. They could have gotten away with it against a man who was not sustained by love."

He thought, "It's certainly the work of God who is love that the woman who loves me is a match for them. Alone they could have taken me. In the same circumstances, they could have taken Letia. But together nothing can hurt us."

He thought that it was all in scale too—that the little lever with which he would unseat his enemies was a check for \$5,000,000. He felt pleased that he could think of \$5,000,000 as a little thing. Everything in Letia's and his love was in scale—in millions. He had millions of readers for his magazines and would one day have millions of employees. Certainly there must already be millions who in some way contributed to Facts, Inc.'s operations, whether as lumberjacks or postmen or the men who ran the railways. In a way, they *all* worked for him. If he chose to run for public office—the thought opened up—millions of people would vote for him.

He caught his breath at the thought of what a great force he and Letia were.

Within a few years, once its crisis was passed, *Fantasy*

would have made him so rich that any dream was possible. And all the multiplied power that would be his was now about to be made secure by that same love that he felt had generated it. It was all one and life was whole. A great love could be told in terms of financial equations as well as in terms of passionate embraces.

Suddenly a great desire to be with Letia came over him, to look on the glory of her hair, to hold her sweet face in his hands, to touch her lips, to put his arms around her and to embrace her. The business of the loan and of the conspiracy—Falkenstall's droning voice as he had unrolled the details—the whole matter was so thoroughly disposed of in Sturges' mind that he did not think of it again as he leaped to his feet and strode along the path in the park toward where it curved east into Fifth Avenue.

His face, as the first street lamp caught it, was aglow with confident happiness.

*The Big Touch*

LETIA HAD MADE her first re-evaluation of Sturges by the time she returned from her second trip to California, this time to marry him.

The day after she had fallen in love with him, he had been superman.

When he made such a problem of getting rid of Mary, Letia reduced her estimate of Sturges by dropping the "super" and substituting simply "great." He had, in her new opinion, a flaw, a human failing. He was not all-powerful. A stupid little female and her lawyer could embarrass him.

Well, Letia reassured herself, human greatness often came so damaged in transit. God had not packed him perfectly and something had happened to him before he had been delivered to her. It was not too important; as soon as she was his legal wife, Letia could make up for whatever it was in Sturges which let him be imposed upon so illogically.

The fact about Sturges that *was* important to Letia remained unchallenged. He was still one of the world's great ones, towering over her, his reputation keeping her in her place as a female. He was still the single most successful young publisher in the single most successful and powerful country in the world. In his middle thirties, he was already so rich that, his properties prospering and multiplying, he could not help but one day be also one of the richest men in the world, taxes or no taxes.

Moreover, Sturges had accomplished and amassed what he had by his own unaided efforts. Letia was inclined to believe the legend that Allen Bishop had made important contributions to the success of Facts, Inc., but, as she analyzed it, that fact only added to Sturges' stature. The bigger the man Bishop had been, the more credit to Sturges for having been able to make such good use of him. She thought that Sturges had been very adroit in getting rid of Bishop at a moment which was so sound strategically. Bishop's contribution had already been

made when Sturges bought him out for an amount that could now be seen to have been pin money.

He was quite a fellow, her husband—Letia thought—and her own successes seemed to her to have been simply lucky breaks in comparison. She was very proud of him and forgave him letting Mary's lawyer throw him off his stride. After all, a Mary could only happen once in his life, and after Sturges had told her how much Mary's money had once helped him, Letia felt she understood why he had ever married such an unfascinating woman. He had Letia's sympathy for what he had had to do.

Letia had plenty of time, while she was in California waiting out the divorce, to think about these things, so that when she came back, she was again at peace with herself. And the mere sight of Sturges waiting for her at the airport gate had again made her feel weak with yearning for him.

In those early days of feeling set free, Sturges was a very fine lover and did not disappoint her at all. In addition to her worldly satisfaction with him as a great man, she now felt physically dependent on his making love to her as she had never felt physically dependent on anything before, not even on eating food or on resting when she was tired.

Neither Sturges nor Letia could have felt happier during the weeks preceding and immediately following their formal wedding of each other.

It was in New Mexico on the honeymoon, however, that Letia began to see that, as Sturges took up his business life again, she would want some outside interest to fill the hours when he was preoccupied. Secure as she felt in his position in the world, she perceived at once that it would take the passage of several years before Sturges would be so famous, so important, and so great that just being his wife would absorb all of her.

By then, Facts, Inc., would be a true publishing Empire, and Sturges would be making presidents instead of even unique new magazines. If he chose, he might even be president himself; certainly his position would be so dominant that whether he ran for office or not, the country could not be managed without his participation.

But meanwhile she would want something besides knitting to keep her hands occupied, and the idea of her being installed as the editor of Sturges' new magazine seemed a stroke of

genius. It had everything. It would be a kind of apprenticeship for her as a great publisher's partner, and it would be fun.

Letia's first thoughts, then, about publishing were of how much fun it might be. In due course she became more serious about her husband's chosen field of endeavor.

She had never thought a great deal about how the country that had given her so much was managed, about who made the rules and saw to it that other people lived up to them. She had concentrated, really, on the role of massed capital, on the ability of large aggregations of money to provide whatever it was one wanted in life. She simply presumed that the stuff of money was so powerful that it must certainly be in some way behind the dreary business of selecting the candidates and getting them elected.

She had never understood the caution of rich men with their money, the relative timidity with which they defied the mores, and when she had asked about it, the only explanation she had been given was "fear of public opinion." If this was true—and it seemed to be, even if she didn't sympathize with it—then public opinion was the natural enemy of wealth. Public opinion, then, was also *her* enemy, even though she had personally never felt anything but scorn for it.

Letia did not, when she came right down to it, know what the rich men with whom she discussed such subjects meant by "public opinion," anyway. She presumed, then, that it was the sum of the opinions of all the little people whose individual opinions did not matter. It seemed strange to her that the sum of so many nothings could be Something—and Something Important and to be feared. But without further knowledge she would have to accept the fact that it was so, and that it was actually strong enough to temper the conduct of individuals who were apparently much more powerful than she.

So far, roughly, Letia had worked it out for herself while still on the way to her union with Sturges. Now, thinking about her new husband's occupation as publicist, she saw that if public opinion was the enemy of wealth, it was the publicist alone who could protect wealth from its natural enemy. The publicist alone had the proper antidote.

Since, as soon as possible, Letia always translated abstractions into personal terms, she immediately recognized these thoughts as confirming her confidence in her lover's importance. She

knew why they had chosen to fall in love with each other. She had always known instinctively that there was a special importance to the event; she recognized that importance as a mission to defend the world that created them both. United, they would stand against the natural enemies of wealth, giving purpose to Sturges' publications.

Here, at last, everything fitted together. She had always known that Roosevelt and the things he stood for were on the other side, even though she had respected Roosevelt's personal mastery and even admired the President's disdain of his detractors. While she was Mrs. Phelps, she had heard her clients at Long House bemoaning the fact that that world was without a leader who could oppose Roosevelt, a man who could stand up against the times. Now God had brought her together with Sturges to fill the vacuum.

At this juncture, Letia considered the publications which supported Sturges and noted that while it was clear that they were never on Roosevelt's side, it was equally true that they were not yet committed to an all-out attack on his way of life. There was no militancy to *Facts*. Its editors were simply mildly prejudiced historians. This puzzled her until she asked Fairstreet about it one day.

She asked Fairstreet, "Why are Sturges' magazines always so nice to those terrible people in Washington?"

Fairstreet laughed. "Well, I'll tell you, Letia," he said. "The first thing a publication has to have is readers. After you have the readers your advertising begins to be worth something. And not until you've got all this working extremely well is it good business to try to use your circulation as a lecture audience. You know Sturges better than I," he went on, "but it has always seemed to me he was being damned smart about not overplaying his hand. He likes to lecture but he's smart enough to hold himself in. He hasn't been in the game long enough. He hasn't enough chips yet either."

"Of course that was it," Letia thought later, "and that's why Sturges is so much bigger than I am—because, like any woman, I might have gotten so mad at those people that I couldn't have kept my mouth shut. But no fool, my husband. When the time comes, he'll be ready."

This conclusion made her very happy and she now looked confidently ahead to the day when Sturges, like Hearst—and the lesser Hearsts, like that man McCormick in Chicago and

Roy Howard, whom she had met in New York—would be powerful enough to take his proper place as a molder of thought.

After *Fantasy* was profitable, he would surely begin buying newspapers and radio stations. She could chart his future in her imagination.

Letia felt a sense of keen and sustained exhilaration, thinking of the day when Sturges would take the lead in setting the world right-side-up again. He would put the nation's servants—the men who mined the ore, and who did whatever you did to make steel, and who put automobiles together—back in their places. Truly she saw that Roosevelt's sin was the Biblical sin of turning maid against mistress, man against master. In the Lord's name, Sturges would punish him.

This was as far as Letia got in her evolution of a new philosophy not too long after her return to New York from her honeymoon.

She had thought these thoughts, as she thought about everything that was important to her, alone and without giving confidence. Besides, it fitted into her conception of who she was now. She assumed that Sturges had thought all these things out for himself and that she was just catching up to him in learning how to be of service as his partner.

The flaw, of course, was that all this thinking was based on the assumption that Sturges' mind worked like hers. This is the trouble with a lot of thinking that goes on about what is in other people's heads, but Letia, who was quick and bright but a long way from being profound, was unaware of that and it did not even occur to her that the great Sturges Strong might be a full ten years behind her in his development of so concrete a philosophy.

At the very time when Letia was thinking such thoughts, her husband was passing through a phase in which he had again stopped thinking at all. He was wholly and at first gloriously full of the moment, and everything that happened to Facts, Inc., during the first year after his marriage took him by surprise—first the extent of *Fantasy's* success, then the still more drastic extent of his own personal danger.

Letia stopped thinking about such large subjects because the practical aspects of beginning her new life distracted her attention and because, emotionally, she was beginning to be so hurt by Sturges' behavior.

There was first the fact that he was so inconsiderate as to

take her literally when she had first said she was not interested in editing his new magazine. There was next his own new pre-occupation with it after its success. Sometimes, when she was alone, Letia would hurt until tears came to her eyes. She would say to herself, "I suppose this is part of being a woman. This is the other half of it."

She felt a great sorrow for all neglected women and the luxury of her life began to seem ironic to her in the long hours when Sturges was not with her.

Once Letia went to lunch with Sturges to the apartment of a very famous European woman whose husband, too, was famous. Sturges was conferring the distinction of a serious article in *Facts* about them both. The European woman, whose looks could not hold a candle to Letia's but who was irritatingly sure of herself, monopolized Sturges' attention throughout the luncheon and afterwards led him to the opposite end of the drawing room and seated him close to her, in intimate tête-à-tête. Letia did her best to remain graceful. She concerned herself with examining the magazines on the table and wandered about making unfavorable comments to herself on the furnishings. Finally, when she could contain herself no longer, she strode across the room, determined to push her way into the conversation. The European was more than ready for her. She met Letia with one of her most charming smiles and said gaily, "Ah, I know how you feel, my darling. Such a bore to be a great man's wife, isn't it?"

The times when Letia thought so, too, came increasingly often, but always she reassured herself that this was simply a time that they were going through. Sturges was away on the battlefield commanding his army in a new conquest. Soon he would return with the new slaves he had taken, chained to the wheels of his chariot. Soon *Fantasy* would have made him so rich that there would have to be another interlude. Then his people would come to him with other plans for new conquests, and they would listen to them together, she and Sturges, and together they would sanction his armies' employment in one final campaign.

After that Sturges would never have to return to the field again but would be a true emperor, with plenty of adequate generals to do his fighting for him. When this last campaign was discussed—it could be a campaign to take over the remains of the Hearst empire; she had heard Sturges talk idly of that

—she would not make the same mistake she had made before. She would insist on an active part for herself this time. And she would play it so well that Sturges' eyes would shine with pride in her, he would know that his consort was a woman who was worthy of him in any endeavor.

So far had Sturges and Letia been drifted apart by the tides that *Fantasy* had set in motion that Letia was actually dreaming such dreams on the very afternoon that Sturges came to her with the news of his threatened defeat at the hands of the bankers.

The duplex apartment in which Letia had established them was on the twelfth floor of a building on the west side of Park Avenue. It had its own private elevator that gave on a large foyer from which a curving stairway ascended to the upper floor. On the foyer floor, there were four rooms: a small drawing room on the Park Avenue side, a large formal drawing room on the corner, a small paneled library facing on the side street, and, beyond this, the dining room and the kitchen. Letia liked the big drawing room best. It flattered the full-length portrait of her. Its easy elegance was in far better taste than any room in the Phelps' Fifth Avenue house. Letia had long since learned which of the best decorators served her best and was unjealous of the arrangements of furniture they made for her.

The little paneled study she did not like at all. It suggested a man who had to take his private business away and hide with it instead of a man whose business was important enough to be conducted in a throne room. But the room had been there and the decorator had laughingly said that if Sturges did not want it, Letia could use it to interview servants in. Sturges had not appeared to like it much better than Letia, so it was a double surprise when, after his unexpected appearance in late afternoon, he led her downstairs from the bedroom where she had been dictating letters to one of her own secretaries and took her into the little paneled library.

When the folding double door was closed, Sturges said theatrically, "I'd rather the servants didn't overhear what I've got to say, kitten."

Sometimes Sturges called Letia his kitten in moments of real intimacy, but usually it was a term of endearment she knew

that he employed when he was self-conscious and was going to say something that he thought she wouldn't like.

Letia composed herself on the small sofa which faced the fireplace. By one side of the fireplace, the decorator had installed the marble head that Jo Davidson had done of her. Letia had never liked it; Davidson had cut the classical lines of her face into the marble in such a way that the features were totally devoid of any expression. She had told the sculptor that some day she would get him to do another head and that in that head he should admit how much he hated her, because she thought that even such a head would be much more flattering than the deadpan thing he had done.

Now, as she relaxed consciously on the sofa, her real face began to look a little like the sculptured face opposite her. As consciously as she relaxed, she took the expression out of her face because she was so sure that Sturges was going to say something unpleasant.

Sturges said, "Darling, there are a lot of things I've got to tell you about . . ."

He was standing, squared away in front of her, with his feet apart but with his head turned so that he was looking toward the two windows instead of at his wife. There was a big mahogany desk, surfaced with polished green leather, between the windows. It was very tidy and looked unused.

"I don't think I know where to begin," he said, suddenly. He had come striding home with a confident step, but it had been a long time since he'd spoken to Letia of serious things and now he looked as if he felt ill at ease.

"You're in trouble," said Letia, calmly. "Come, darling, sit here and tell me about it."

He sat down clumsily.

Letia saw that he was breathing in hard gasps. In her heart she felt the fear that was coming back to him and, instinctively, she put out her arms.

"My darling," she said. She began to feel moved by his unhappiness. "I love you, my darling. Don't be frightened. What have they done to you?"

Sturges got his eyes up to look into hers.

"They've damn near busted me, darling," he blurted out.

"Who's they?" Letia said, automatically. At this moment, her mind was a blank. She was filling with a sudden sympathy

for this man whom she loved and an anxiety to stop him hurting.

"Those bastards. The bankers. My own directors."

"How, my love?" She held him against her and freed a hand to draw his head down on her shoulder.

"Oh, God," he said, "I can't talk about it."

"It'll be better, darling, if you do."

He pushed himself free but then took one of her hands and clung to it.

"Falkenstall told me this afternoon," he said, making an obvious effort to control his voice. "It's that God damn loan I had to make to pay Mary. The bank's lost its nerve. They want to sell it out. My own directors are in with them. They want to take me over."

These things were still only words to Letia. The pain in Sturges' face made her heart hurt with sympathy.

"Darling, darling, what kind of nonsense is this? Look at me! Didn't I ever tell you how much I loved you? How can anything hurt us?"

Letia's face now bore no resemblance to the statue's. It was alive again. Her eyes were wide and wet with feeling. Her lips were parted. She was wholly uninterested in what he had told her. She only wanted, desperately now, to make him stop hurting—and to lose herself in making him stop hurting.

She stood up and said, "Here, hold me." She wanted to feel him against her. On the small sofa it was awkward.

When he held her in his arms and bent his head over her, kissing her, Letia knew that he had begun to feel again, that she had loosened the hold of his fear. Still kissing him, she felt suddenly grateful for whatever it was that had happened. It had brought him back to her, as a man.

They kissed each other, standing in the little library, for a long time.

Presently, Sturges put his head back and began to laugh.

"It's love, love, love," he said and the pain was all gone from his face. His eyes were sparkling now. "Oh, darling, it's been too long." He looked triumphant.

"Much, much, much too long," the woman said meltingly, looking up into his face. "Take me away, darling."

Again he kissed her and then he took her hand and led her away from the little room with the statue in it and up the wide curving stairway. Like Emperor and Empress they

walked and came presently to the room in which they lived together and it had never been so wonderful, knowing each other.

By evening, Letia knew that her man was whole again and she felt very good and young and whole again herself. Sitting before the mirrors of her dressing table, her long slim fingers stroking back her white-blond hair, she thought idly, "Whatever had it all been about? Men are so silly. They make such a *thing* of things."

She said, "Tell me, darling, what *was* all that nonsense that got you in such a stew?"

Sturges lay dreamily on a chaise longue watching her in her mirrors.

"Oh, Christ," he said, "I don't know what made them think they could get away with it. I told you all there is. They thought they could buy all my stock from the bank."

"Why, darling?" Letia cocked her head, drawing it back from the mirror, to appraise the line her hair made as she held it so, slanting back from her forehead.

"Oh—God damn nonsense," he said. That old feeling of her being too beautiful to bear was coming back to him. The lines of her nakedness were as delicately perfect as the lines of her face. Her skin seemed translucent. He ached with the wonder of her.

"What God damn nonsense, darling?" she said. In the mirror, her eyes saw first his and then her own. She felt a little of what he felt about how wonderful she was, seeing her face and her long smooth body in the mirror. She caressed herself admiringly.

"Oh—it all started when that old so-and-so at the bank got scared that *Facts'* stock might go down some more. He came around to see me a week ago."

"Could it go down some more, darling?" She picked a comb from the table and began to play with it.

"Oh, sure," he said, scornfully. "But so what? We can pay it all off any time we feel like it. That's what they never thought of." He began to feel little sensations of warmth about her, little sensations of re-awakening yet again. She was so marvelously female, sitting there. Her arms were above her head, now, combing her long, lustrous hair. Her figure was prettily arched.

"Why didn't they ever think of that, darling?" she said,

twisting to look at him directly instead of in the mirror. "What did they think would happen if the stock went down?"

"Oh, hell—if the stock went down, and we weren't able to put up enough to satisfy the bank, why, the bank would sell my stock to cover the loan. God, you're a beautiful thing, darling."

Letia smiled.

"And you're the ugliest man I ever knew—and the most wonderful."

"I wish you'd never known *any* other men," Sturges said.

"There aren't any other men in the world. Only you. You're the only *man* in the world. Why didn't they think about how easy it was for you to beat them—by putting up the money, I mean?"

"Oh, that," said Sturges. He got up and then leaned forward to kiss the nape of her neck. With one hand, she still held her hair above her head. "Because they know damn well *I* haven't got the money."

"How *are* you going to pay it, then, darling?" she smiled at his face, over hers in the mirror. There was no trace of anxiety in either face.

"I'll have to touch you for a small loan, my little blonde kitten," he said, grinning. "That's what they forgot, sweet one, that there are two of us. Come here to me, darling."

His hands were on her shoulders. She twisted playfully away.

"No. Let me get this all straight first. You've got me full of thinking about this, now. Let's get this over with."

"There isn't anything to get over with," he said. He was just a touch irritated by her denial. "We pay off the loan and to hell with it. When I have time I'll get mad with them."

"And punish them. Really! Those lice! How much do you need, darling?"

"Who knows?" he said. "It depends on the stock. How far down it goes. Some dope may lose his nerve and sell."

"How far could it go down?"

"Letia! That's a silly question. If somebody panics, somebody who has a lot . . . well, for a little while maybe it couldn't be sold for anything. It doesn't matter. Next year we're going to make back all we're losing now."

A long *robe de chambre* lay draped over the back of a chair by the dressing table. Reaching, Letia took the robe and, wrig-

gling her arms into it, wrapped it about her to clothe herself.

"It's not a silly question, Sturges. How much would you need if the stock wasn't worth anything?"

"All right, if you want to talk about it, let's talk about it." His own bathrobe was already on his shoulders. He wrapped it tighter about him. "I'm in hock for exactly \$5,000,000—the three that I gave to Mary and one each that I had to raise to set up the trust funds. The rest—the house and all—I did out of the dividends."

Letia let herself sit down abruptly on the chair that had held the robe. Above the trenches where her mind still lay sleeping, a warning rocket arched into the air. She felt suddenly cold despite the warmth of the bedroom and the heavy silk of the robe. There was danger near.

"You never told me that!" she said, sharply.

"You never asked me. You told me when you went to California that you never wanted to hear what I settled on Mary. Good God, Letia—you made an issue of it."

"I didn't think you could have been so stupid. Good Heavens, Sturges—*five million dollars?*"

"Letia, it doesn't make a damn bit of difference. *Fantasy* will make twice that in a year some day."

"Some day!" The whole world was rocking.

Sturges sat down opposite her, perched on a corner of the bed they had just shared.

Letia gathered herself together before he could speak to her again. Her mind was wide awake now, and rallying to her defense.

"Do you know what you're asking, Sturges? Do you know what you're asking? You're asking for practically every cent I have."

"No, I'm not, darling. God damn it. This is all just paper nonsense. You wouldn't have to pay off the whole loan, of course. Just a few million. What counts is getting through this year so that we can make some real dough with *Fantasy*."

"A few million!" *Fantasy!* A fantasy is what it is, all right!"

"It's not. Now Letia, stop it." But his dominance of relationship between them had gone and he sounded cross and unsure of himself. She saw that there were droplets of perspiration on his forehead.

"Oh, God, oh, God," she said, shielding her eyes from his with her hand. "I've got to think." Her mind was not alone

on the field now. Seeing the pain come back to him brought her heart, running. "Oh, you poor darling idiot."

"I'm not an idiot. I know what I'm doing."

"Yes, maybe you do. You did it to Mary, once. Maybe you're doing it to me. You took all her money once. It was only luck she ever got it back."

The blood rose to his cheeks. A turbulence of emotion seemed to choke him. He rose and strode without speaking, past her, to the dressing room where his evening clothes were already laid out. Ignoring them, he dressed himself in a business suit from the closet. Grimly, he wrestled with the knot of his tie. Then he went back through the bedroom toward the door to the hall.

Letia said, "Darling, I didn't mean that."

"What *did* you mean?" He hesitated.

"I don't know, I don't know," said Letia. She held out her hands toward him. "Don't leave me, darling. Don't leave me now."

"I guess you're right," he said. "I'm a heel." He rocked a little, standing, and the tears began to come to his eyes. Letia took him in her arms and he began to shake with sobs.

"There, there, darling, you mustn't. Please stop," she said.

And for a little while it was better.

But when at last he was calm again, Letia said, "I can't do it, just like this, Sturges—risk everything we have left. Maybe I can do it—but not just like this. You're too close to it to have any judgment. And it's too new to me. And I can't think when you're near me, darling. You're too emotional about it. Would it hurt you awfully if I went away for a while? To work it out for myself."

"Sure," said Sturges. "Sure, you go away."

"I mean for just a little while," she answered. "An hour, even."

It was still only ten in the evening when she went. They had both ignored a dinner they were supposed to have been at. Neither of them had even remembered it. The chauffeur was still waiting patiently on Park Avenue.

Letia said to the chauffeur, "I want to go for a long drive, Martin. Anywhere. It doesn't matter. Just drive until I tell you to stop."

When she got back it was not quite two. The lights were lit in the study as well as in the foyer. She found Sturges there.

"This is the only place I seem to be able to get away from those damn servants," he said. "They're all still up. They think we've had a hell of a row." He looked wan and helpless.

"Sturges, darling, I've decided I can't do it at all," Letia said to him. "It would do something to us, if I did it. I'd own you. I don't want to own you. I want you to own me."

"Is that why?" Sturges looked only very, very tired.

"No, I don't think it is all the reason." Now her face was truly as impassive as the statue's, and as white and as hard and as perfect. "It's too much a part of me, all that money, for me to risk. Even for you, darling. I think this is your problem and you'll just have to work it out."

There was just the ghost of a smile in Sturges' eyes.

"I was right, finally, anyway," he said. "I worked it all out while you were gone. What you would say when you got back. I knew when you left that you couldn't do it."

"Don't tell me about it," Letia said. "I don't ever want to talk about money with you again."

A last little flicker of anger rose and died in him.

He said, "Come, let's go to bed."

Together, they went out again through the doors to the little library and again they ascended the stairway. This time they were clearly seen to be simply two people who were married to each other and who bore no resemblance whatever to an Emperor and his Empress. Even Letia looked tired after the last brief conversation in the library where it had all begun.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### *Survival*

AFTER THE DREADFUL evening on which Letia made her decision, there followed two months of agonizing uncertainty for Sturges. The momentum of a courage born of desperation had carried him, the day after Letia's refusal to help, through another session with the president of the bank, a session which Sturges conducted with such ferocity that it may have accounted for his having got the two months of grace.

The president of the bank arrived, prepared to be very tough this time. He was sure that, however Sturges got himself out of his fix, some large sacrifice on the publisher's part would be involved. Sturges opened the conversation savagely with, "All right, let's get down to it. At what figure did you propose to sell me out?"

The banker had not meant to be specific but he was startled into saying, "\$90 a share was discussed."

"What's the stock selling for today?"

"\$100 bid, \$102 asked," said the banker, ". . . when I left the office."

"All right," said Sturges, "then I have ten points left. Now get out of here and tell my fat friends that I'm not interested in selling them any stock until I have to."

"Only a man who was very sure of himself would have been so rude," the banker reported to his first vice-president.

The same afternoon, Sturges summoned Falkenstall and told him what he had said to the banker. Falkenstall had never seen Sturges in so aggressive a mood, and he called up two of his fellow directors in turn to advise them to hold their horses. He called from a pay station in Grand Central.

"There's no use putting pressure on the chap," he said. "After all, the bank knows where you stand, and if it's as bad as you think, the bank people will come to you before they do anything."

Among the directors, there was some talk of selling stock to depress the price until Sturges could hold on no longer. They were all respectable men, however, and while they had

no compunction at all about taking advantage of Sturges' predicament to grab the company, they felt that artificially maneuvering the market was beneath them. Besides, it was difficult, with the New Deal security regulations in force, and it involved risk. So they backed away from the notion and prepared to wait it out.

By the end of the first week of waiting, Sturges' own nerves had begun to crack but his enemies did not know this. He was careful to avoid them. When he cut one of them on the street, they decided that he must have got wind of what they were up to and they could hardly blame him for being angry.

Actually, Sturges was already far beyond anger. All the towering edifice of his daydreams had come crashing about him and he saw himself as a man trapped by his own foolishness. He should never have let Brennan and Schulberg and the others take such chances with the fate of *Facts, Inc.* *The Knowing Weekly*, he saw, was doing better than ever and, had he stuck to it, none of this would have happened. He recalled that he had never had confidence in *Fantasy*. It was too gaudy and daring and involved risks which he had been crazy to take.

The only prescription Sturges knew for the situation was the old prescription which Mary had given so long ago, hard work. He went to *Facts'* offices early and he stayed late. His associates did not know what had come over him, but he now kept them so busy and drove them so hard that they had little time to wonder.

Meanwhile, the value of the stock on which his fate hung fluctuated with each sale of a few hundred shares. It would drop a few points a day for several days and then it would rally.

A number of times, Sturges tried to work out some program for himself more constructive than simply waiting out his fate, but nothing helpful occurred to him. He thought for a while of getting in touch with Mary in the hope of borrowing the money he needed from her, but he was sure that she would ask Chambers' advice about whether she should lend it to him. He was certain that Chambers would turn him down.

One of the strangest things about his reaction during this period was that at no time during the two months of his agony did he feel resentful toward Letia. In his emotional moments, instead of reproaching her, he reproached himself for having

put her in the position that he had. The crucial evening with her had been so painful that he could not seem to remember it clearly. He could not bring back the image of his own confidence that he and Letia were so close that there had been no question but that she would help him. He only recalled her saying that this was his problem and that he would have to solve it for himself. He lived through the two months when his fate was in the balance in an emotional stupor.

At home with Letia, life went on, apparently as if nothing had happened between them. During the months before they had come together again so briefly and intensely, their life had become filled with the formalities of being very rich. Most of it was lived under the eyes of servants, much of it entertaining or being entertained. When the time came for them to be alone together, the only change in Sturges' conduct was that he was now as polite and solicitous as Letia's own maid. He seemed desperately anxious not to displease, as if the only thing in the world he could not stand was a moment of her displeasure. Whenever he thought of talking to her about anything really personal, he cautioned himself, "Not until it's over."

He was now so completely committed to waiting for his fate to be settled by factors over which he had no control that he visualized no future and thought neither of what would happen if he remained in control of his company nor of how it would be if he were thrown out.

Letia, however, thought a great deal about both possibilities.

During the ride on which she had made her decision, she had spent some time trying to arrive at a realistic appraisal of Sturges' situation. Her conclusion was that he must surely have exaggerated his peril even if she was not sure enough of this reaction to base her decision on it. She had made her decision on what she felt was a profound disillusionment in Sturges himself. It was not simply that he was in trouble; it was the kind of trouble he was in. She told herself that she might have understood his risking everything to double his fortune. But the trouble Sturges was in was so clearly, first, the result of his fatuousness in his dealings with Mary, and second—and this was the most terrifying thought of the two—the result of an error in judgment in the management of his own company.

Obviously only a colossal error in judgment could account

for Facts, Inc.'s losing money despite the terrific success that *Fantasy* had been. As when she had been at sea on the *Miramar* in the early hours of the hurricane, Letia had only what she knew for sure to guide her judgment, and what she knew for sure about the magazine *Fantasy* was that the public wanted it in unlimited quantities. All the if's, and's, but's, and when's one side, this fact stood out above all the others. In his own field, in the management of his own properties, Sturges was failing. When she got this far in her analysis, the die was cast. It would have been conceivable for her to have merged her interests with a man who was what she thought Sturges had been. It was inconceivable that she should commit herself to salvaging the man that she now saw Sturges to be. She thought bitterly of the unkind God who had blinded her into falling in love with him.

Having made her decision to stand apart from her husband's misfortune, Letia had then to face the fact that he was still the man she loved, and that even that afternoon she had felt an unbearable need for him. If he was really about to be destroyed, that would be a problem. If this was only a false alarm, if he was simply acting hysterically about nothing, it would pass and she felt she would be happy again with him even though she could sense it would be on a different basis. She would cross the bridge of his failure, when and as she came to it. In the meantime, even though she would not lend him money, she would presume that he had exaggerated his crisis. He was still a rich man and would remain one.

On this basis, Letia took up life again with him, studiously acting out the assumption that nothing would happen. Like Sturges, she was waiting.

Near the end of the two months, stock in Facts, Inc., sold one day at \$122 a share. But the simple passage of time had begun to disprove the most malicious of the rumors that had been spread about the magazine by its competitors. In the more conscientious of the advertising agencies, the evidence in *Fantasy's* favor was beginning to accumulate. The public's appetite for it continued. It began to look as if buying space in it would be worth while for any advertiser who could afford to meet the new rates which had been announced for the following year. A few agency executives who had been watching the oscillations of its stock decided that if they were going to recommend it to their clients, they might also

as well share in the increased value to the stock which their business would mean. They began giving orders to their brokers to pick up shares.

There were never very many shares in Sturges' company for sale to the public. It took only a few orders to raise the market price twenty points.

When the stock passed \$150, and the word was out that it was a buy, Falkenstall decided that the time had come to congratulate Sturges and to make sure that Sturges had no doubts about whose side his lawyer was on.

Sturges' lawyer hardly recognized the man on whom he came to call. Sturges had neither gained nor lost weight, but he looked as if he were a dozen years older. Falkenstall could not help saying, "Man, you look terrible. You've been working too hard. You've got to get away from here."

One way of looking at the two months which the Stronges spent waiting out Sturges' financial fate would be that it was a time of truce between Sturges and Letia. By tacit consent, the subject of the crisis was never again discussed. Letia gradually became certain that, on balance, it had never existed—positively not to the extent that Sturges had represented it. So she continued to conduct herself as the wife of an important, and wholly secure, rich man, and she would no more have thought of spending any of her own money on their establishment than she had when she was Randolph Phelps' wife.

For his part, Sturges had no stomach for reopening the matter and the weeks went haltingly by. Between them, it was as if they had formally agreed to a time of separation, even though they still lived under the same roof and even slept together—as strangers in the bed which they had built for themselves as lovers.

Each to himself agreed that it could not be long and that when Sturges knew where he stood, they would both be able to relax. Then they could again talk of intimate things, such as how much they cared for each other and what they really felt about anything.

The difficulty was that the good news of his survival did not come to Sturges dramatically, as the threat of his financial ruin had, but leaked out little by little instead. And as the

value of his holdings steadied and then rose, the effects of his being released from pressure surprised them both.

Sturges knew Letia must be aware of how well things were finally going. After all, there were the daily quotations in the papers, showing what the stock in Facts, Inc., was selling for on the Curb Exchange. He knew Letia read the financial pages—sometimes he overheard her calling Falkenstall to inquire how one of the stocks she held was doing. Yet, although higher and higher prices were now being bid for *Facts'* stock, Letia never mentioned it, never congratulated him, never so much as intimated that she was glad that his enemies were confounded.

What Letia was waiting for, if she could have said, was a positive change in Sturges. She had seen him begin to break up under the pressure of his conflict with his first wife; she had gone away; and when she had come back, he had been himself again, buoyant and confident from having gotten his way. Now she expected some comparable miracle. She felt that he would see how absurd it had been of him to have got so excited about the whole thing. He would see how unnecessary the crisis he had provoked had been. Its happy resolution, of course, completely relieved her of any burden of guilt for having turned him down when he had come begging assistance. She half expected an apology now—an apology in passing, accompanied by the strongest demonstration of his return to mastery of his world.

Under the latter head, Letia thought how satisfying it would be to be present when Sturges castigated his enemies. She knew how deeply he must hate the men who had tried to take advantage of him and she foresaw their public humiliation at her husband's hands. Now he could tell the story of their infamy, hold them up to ridicule, destroy their character in articles in his magazines. She knew a few stories herself about some of them that would make very fine reading, and she began working them into her conversations with Sturges, usually in the presence of others, happily anticipating his picking them up and turning them to effective use.

But instead of giving him pleasure, Letia's malicious gossip about his directors only seemed to make Sturges squirm. He seemed actually anxious—Letia could hardly believe the evidence of her own eyes and ears—to forget the whole business. And instead of relaxing, now that his fortunes were safe,

he seemed to be more anxious than ever about the management of every little detail on both magazines. This was a complete reversal of form from Sturges' expansiveness on their honeymoon and immediately following. It is no wonder that Letia could not understand it.

What she did not understand was that Sturges had been so severely shaken by the nearness of disaster that the experience had awakened all his earlier emotional insecurity. He was once again wholly out of touch with reality, and there were days when he felt so personally inept that the composition of a simple business letter seemed beyond him. He thought secretly that the truth of his existence was that he had been a failure all his life and that everything profitable that had happened to him had been an accident.

Sturges now exaggerated Bishop's importance in the founding of Facts, Inc., to far beyond the fondest claims of his own enemies. Bishop had created Facts, Inc.; it was Mary's money that had saved it; *Fantasy* was the creation of the talented men whom Bishop had hired. It had all been a grotesque accident that Sturges was the proprietor of this great organization.

There was only one compelling necessity in his life and that was to cover up the evidence that it had all been an accident. He had, at all costs, to hide his secret from the world—as long as he could. Eventually it would all come out and he would be the laughing-stock of his profession; he must save himself from that for as long as possible.

Thus, to Sturges, the rise in the value of his holdings meant only a kind of a stay to his exposure, to his conviction as an impostor and a humbug.

Whenever his associates, to relieve him of the details, made a decision on their own responsibility, Sturges was certain that they were demonstrating their loss of respect for him. The fact that the directors who had plotted against him continued to avoid him Sturges set down not to their fear but to their scorn of him. The natural loneliness of his position as chief executive he interpreted as his just deserts; he was without friends and no one cared for him.

During this period, Letia's easy ability to cope with life was a continual reproach to him. He saw her across the table from him, everything that he would like to be, poised and confident, commanding effortlessly. He became frightened of

her physically and the nightmarish thought kept coming to him that one day she would slap him in the face and he would burst into tears and run away. At the same time, she seemed more desirable than ever, more glamorous and wonderful. Her patient waiting on his return to manhood he took as gentle condescension, and it stung like acid in a raw cut.

At only one point did his secret sufferings break through, and then only in a way that seemed so bizarre to his associates that it failed to tip them off to what was going on inside him.

The point at which Sturges was stung into action had to do with his personal finances. Only in his attitude toward his personal finances did he give his insecurity away to those who could see. What his good fortune did was to make a miser of him. During the months of crisis he felt nothing; but as soon as Sturges was relieved of the worst pressure, he began to worry irrationally about how much money he and Letia were spending just to live. Their extravagance now seemed to him the thing that had precipitated the crisis. The epic of *Fantasy's* success and what it cost had been beyond his control. But while it had been going on, he saw that literally hundreds of thousands of his dollars had been spent on possessions and places to live, servants and appurtenances. Of these hundreds of thousands of dollars, he himself had accounted for few. The balance was all Letia's doing.

Here and here alone, Letia seemed to Sturges to be unreasonable, thoughtless of his interests, almost hostile. He seemed at first to be as helpless, here, as he was in every other phase of his life, for, during the crisis, to talk to Letia about what she was spending would have opened the whole thing up again and that was too painful even to contemplate.

But after he was reassured in his mind that the danger of his being sold out was over, he decided that at least he would see to it that he never again endangered his fortune as a result of a personal deficit. And, after all, there was no more necessity for spending large sums—Letia had them established in their duplex apartment in New York, and that was decorated, and the house she had rented on Long Island was furnished. They could live better than well in these two habitations. He would, therefore, personally halt their expansion by speaking to Letia about dropping the idea of a place in Palm Beach the coming winter. The place in Palm

Beach had been under casual discussion the spring before and he did not know whether Letia had taken any steps.

Letia had been noticing little reactions in Sturges of which he had been unconscious. Several times, recently, she had had pictures sent up to the apartment to try in this place or that and she had observed that after Sturges had found out how expensive they were, he had disliked them. Never before had he shown any interest one way or the other. He had also reacted adversely to her casual mention that she had told Martin to begin training three new chauffeurs so that they would no longer have all this nonsense of worrying about how many hours a driver of one of their cars had been on duty.

"Either you have people to drive your cars or you haven't," Letia had said when Sturges had worried about how they would manage them all. "It's Martin's job to see that they are competent and know their business."

As a result of such instances, Letia was not wholly unprepared one morning when Sturges said, "I won't be able to get away this winter. You haven't done anything about a place in Florida, have you?"

"If you can't get away, darling, it's all the more important that we have some place you can go, at least for week ends. I hadn't done anything about it but I will this morning."

Sturges fidgeted with his knife and seemed to be examining the initials engraved on its handle with great interest.

"I'd feel a lot better if you didn't, darling," he ventured timidly.

"Nonsense," said Letia. "You're thinking about the money."

"It's not nonsense to think about how much things cost," Sturges flushed, still examining the knife handle.

"It is nonsense for *us* to think about money," Letia said sharply. "Sturges, look at me and stop jiggling that thing. You're making me nervous."

Sturges put the knife in place by his plate like an obedient child. He said, "Yes, darling."

"Now look here, Sturges, this is really insane for us to be talking like this. What's the use of being rich?"

Sturges' face was very red, and even though he had been ordered to, he could not bring himself to look directly at Letia.

"What's the use of being rich?" she repeated. "For heaven's sake, please don't talk about it again."

But Sturges was driven by too desperate an insecurity to let the matter drop entirely. As soon as he got to the office, he sent for Fairstreet and said nervously, "Johnny, I wonder if you would take something on for me. Would you have a run through my bank statements and things and tell me how much Letia and I are spending nowadays?"

When Sturges had been married to Mary, the finances of his household had always been managed between his secretary, who kept his personal checkbook, and Mary herself. Since his divorce and his marriage to Letia, a much more complicated structure had grown. All of the several banks in which Sturges kept cash funds now carried joint accounts for himself and Letia. Letia's own secretariat, which had grown with the passage of time to a staff of four, balanced these accounts, conferring directly with the treasurer of Facts, Inc., regarding their replenishment with additional funds. The dividends from *Facts'* stock were automatically deposited in the principal one of them. On complicated matters, like the purchase of real property, the treasurer of Facts, Inc., conferred with Falkenstall who continued to be Sturges' personal attorney.

Neither Falkenstall nor Facts, Inc.'s treasurer ever discussed such matters with Sturges himself, presuming that he was kept in touch with the situation by his wife. It was she who not only signed the checks but also initialed the chits on *Facts'* treasury and summoned Falkenstall to the presence to go over all deeds and leases. Letia was so clearly in command of every detail that it never occurred to any of them that they had not discharged their responsibilities when they reported to her—through one of the secretaries, on lesser matters; directly, when the occasion warranted. Neither would it have ever occurred to the salaried treasurer of Facts, Inc., to question Sturges' right to go in debt to his own company by withdrawing sums which added up to almost a quarter of a million, and Falkenstall kept his own peace, waiting determination of the larger issue of the bank loans.

The result of all this was that when, as Sturges' personal representative, Fairstreet began his investigation, what he uncovered was almost as complete a surprise to Sturges as to himself.

From Sturges' point of view, it was much worse than he

had anticipated; in fact, he could not believe his own eyes when he saw in black and white what Letia had spent during their first year. Half a million dollars would not begin to cover it. The temporary ten-room apartment they had taken had cost \$5,000 a room to be decorated and most of the furniture and decorations had been abandoned when they had moved, apparently because Letia's advisors felt them unsuitable for the new place. The bill for furnishing the Park Avenue duplex was over \$100,000 itself. There was hardly an important piece in it whose cost did not run into four figures.

In the meantime, there had been the purchase of a site for a new Strong castle on Long Island, its sale at a loss after undesirable features had been discovered, and the buying of another and still more expensive one. Strong's personal payroll had grown to include thirty retainers—and old Towers had taught Letia that the poorest economy in the world was a cheap servant. Sturges saw that they now owned eight automobiles. One was used exclusively for going to and from the theater; three were for the servants. Sturges, whose only personal experience with extravagance had been paying the bills for construction work at Port Chester, was amazed at how much it cost to be rich. He was amazed as a journalist—making the discovery. And then he was terrified.

But even the extraordinary cost of such necessities as shelter, transportation, and service did not account for the size of the annual bill, and when the puzzled Sturges asked Fairstreet what gave, the latter's reply was, "Well, of course there are the things Letia buys for herself."

As if he were an intruder in a boudoir, Sturges considered the accounts which Fairstreet got for him from Letia's secretariat. He himself had bought her a quarter of a million dollars' worth of jewels, each a sentimental piece, purchased when they were first in love, on the occasion of their marriage and on their first personal anniversaries. But now he saw that no more than the routine ornamentation of Letia's costumes ran to around \$10,000 a year. She spent that on small jewels, costume jewelry, etc., to go with the clothes she bought.

"Besides that, they always budget the clothes themselves at \$30,000," Fairstreet explained, as one conspirator to another. "Letia's girls budget it at that—not counting furs."

Involuntarily, Sturges thought, "Do I pay that?" He did not know why it had never occurred to him that Letia did not dress herself from her own funds.

Half apologetically, Fairstreet said, "When she gets things from Long House, she pays a lot less than other people."

"Who gets the fur coats after Letia's worn them?" Sturges asked, scratching his head, the bills for five mink coats spread out in front of him.

Fairstreet did not know for sure. "Maybe the maids. Maybe some of her friends. Maybe she doesn't give them away." He was as fascinated as Sturges.

After Sturges had all the facts together, he was sure he did not know what to do with them, but at least he was prepared when Falkenstall finally came to him to talk about how much money was going out.

Falkenstall waited until there could be no question of the problem being anything more than a nuisance. After he saw that Sturges was coming out on top, he was very glad that he had not revealed the true extent of his intimacy with the other directors. But with Sturges' loan riding easily on the new buoyancy in *Facts'* stock, and the certainty that, only a few months hence, the directors would again be able to declare dividends and that these would end Strong's embarrassment once and for all, Falkenstall thought he could safely discuss the business, running no risk of Sturges' misunderstanding what he had to say.

What Falkenstall had to say was that, after all, Facts, Inc., was theoretically a publicly owned company and that Sturges' withdrawals from the treasury could be misunderstood if a hostile shareholder appeared at the stockholders' meeting in the fall and asked questions. What he had to propose was that Sturges now withdraw some of the stock that he had put up as collateral for his big loans, and with this stock, make a new and relatively modest loan somewhere else. With the proceeds he could reimburse *Facts'* treasury what it had advanced him.

Falkenstall was wholly unprepared for the devastating effect of such a painless proposition. At the first mention of his financial position, Sturges began visibly to tremble and grew white as the broadcloth of his shirt collar.

"What am I going to do? What am I going to do about all

the money we're spending?" was all that Falkenstall could get out of him.

Psychologically, Falkenstall tiptoed away from the sight of Sturges' irrational despair. At least he had got Sturges' assent that he take whatever steps were necessary about the cash he'd drawn from the company, so that that part was not a problem. But the lawyer could not understand why Sturges, who seemed to him to have stood up so well in the real crisis, was now so distraught.

There was a moment after Falkenstall's departure when Sturges was almost resolved to have it out with Letia himself, to go to her and to say, like any other husband, that, God damn it, it was his money she was spending and she would spend it in amounts that pleased him. Whatever would have come of such a showdown, it was never to happen.

For some moments Sturges paced the floor of his big office in an agony of indecision. Then again he sent for Johnny Fairstreet.

"Look here," he said to Fairstreet, "I've got to tell you something that's very personal now. It's a quirk—or I don't know what it is—but it just upsets both of us for Letia and me to talk about money. I want you to get hold of her and go over all the figures that you've gone over with me. I want you to tell her that it doesn't matter how rich I am; we can't go on like this."

"Yes, sir," said Fairstreet.

"Maybe this is a hell of a thing to ask you to do, but it's the only way I can think of to handle it."

"Yes, sir," said Fairstreet again.

And so Fairstreet who, after all, had found the church for them to be married in and had been with them for a good deal of their honeymoon, came into the role of spokesman on money matters between Letia and Sturges Strong. Letia was not offended when he went to her but only amused. She said, "I told Sturges long ago that it is a terribly simple thing. We're rich and that's an end to it. I'm going to pay no attention whatever to him, but please break the news as nicely as you can."

Johnny Fairstreet was very nice about breaking the news and it was a considerable comfort to Sturges to have at least one person in his life with whom he could talk intimately on at least one subject. Fairstreet added the instance to the

book he was contemplating on the eccentricities of the rich and powerful, and he continued to be fascinated by such incidental information as that exactly a thousand dollars a year could be spent on a great lady's hosiery.

The months of the crisis through which Sturges passed were July and August. These were the months when the revenue to be obtained from the sale of magazines is at its lowest. The upward turn in the fortunes of Facts, Inc., came in September, with the beginning of the new season. The period through which Letia waited for Sturges to realize again that he was a great man, and the months which the great man himself spent worrying about the cost of her stockings, were the fall months of September, October, and November. The year in which all this happened was 1941.

Like most of their countrymen, Letia and Sturges were wholly unprepared for the changes in their life that Pearl Harbor was to bring. Without Pearl Harbor and the war that followed, they might never have had a chance to come together again.

*Letia and Sturges Go to War*

TO BOTH STURGES and Letia, The War Effort was something to be taken very seriously. Although neither of them would have put it that way, both the Stronges were grateful to Hitler and Hirohito for having snatched them from the emotional impasse into which they had wedged themselves. It did not pluck the Stronges out together; they were pulled forth separately, and then, in point of fact, pushed in opposite directions. But it ended the months of Letia's waiting for Sturges to make sense, and it forced Sturges right side up again.

Whatever his secret opinion of himself, The War Effort gave Sturges an importance he could not deny. There was the early summons to the White House to discuss the state of the nation; there were the luncheons at which admirals and generals on public relations assignment competed for his, Sturges', support in the revived interservice struggle for power. Most of all, there was the news itself and the compelling reality that how Facts, Inc., handled it was now believed to be important to the welfare of the country.

The very scale of the world's disruption shocked Sturges back to the reality that he was an important man. The interminable hours he spent at his office were no longer hours of escape from himself and Letia; in his own eyes, they were his contribution to the defeat of the nation's enemies. They were also necessary to his business because the war was hardly a month old before the new problems of scarcity and rationing created hundreds of small problems which could not be delegated because they involved basic policies.

The first really serious problem to Facts, Inc., of course, was manpower. Sturges' was an organization of youth; he himself was in his early thirties. Most of his young men were eminently eligible for service, and in the early days of the war the question of whether the press was an essential industry was still wide open. Sturges had no difficulty in making up his mind on where he stood. The rediscovery of his own

importance convinced him that few things could be more essential to winning the war than his keeping his staff intact.

Soon, Facts, Inc., and the national war effort were indistinguishable in Sturges' mind, and he acted with the courage of a very strong conviction. This conviction shielded him from Brennan's—and some of the others'—worry that in order to conserve newsprint and manpower the government might put some limitation on the advertising that might be carried in his magazines. By a happy chance, the very prewar expansion which had almost ruined him was now his greatest security. When quotas finally were set, they were set on the number of copies, and the number of pages per copy, that publications had produced before the war. Moreover, the big risks that the company had taken in buying paper mills, and the forests that supplied them, were now paying off. Whereas some other publishers were having difficulty in getting even the raw material to which they were entitled, Facts, Inc., had its own resources. The business rolled in, now at highly profitable rates. With wages commencing to be frozen, the whole undertaking was profitable beyond even Schulberg's dreams. At last even a multi-million-dollar bank loan ceased to be a significant item in Sturges' economy.

The only price that Sturges had personally to pay accrued in the succession of irritating crises which he had to meet in the adjustment of his operations to wartime conditions. These required his constant attendance. Despite his insistence that *Facts* came first in the war effort, personnel continued to melt away, particularly from the lower echelons where it was more difficult for him to fight the draft boards or to influence the conscience of his employees. The quality of the paper and the printing in his magazines had to be cut. Production and distribution problems multiplied.

The silver lining to these clouds, however, was that each concession that he made increased *Facts'* profits. The price to the public, and the advertising rates, remained the same regardless of whether fewer people got out the magazines or the magazines themselves became skimpier or were printed on cheaper stock. And the government was very thoughtful of publishing as an industry and continued to permit the unlimited purchase of advertising, the cost of which continued to be deductible from corporate incomes as a business ex-

pense, regardless of whether or not the advertiser still had anything to sell the public.

Despite these compensations, Sturges was quite sincere in remembering the war as a period of hardship, during which his business engaged so much of his attention that he had no time for a life of his own. His impasse with Letia was resolved, but it was resolved simply by postponing the necessity for their having any relationship at all.

The effect of the war on Letia, while very different from the effect on Sturges, only increased the distance by which they were separated.

Pearl Harbor really frightened Letia. Somewhere down inside her she had a sneaking suspicion that the disparaging things that Goebbels and the Japanese had to say about the inability of the effete democracies to defend themselves were true. She did not believe the counterpropaganda. It was her instinct to discount the public statements of important people at home. She had lived among them too long to be impressed either by their sincerity or their hard-headedness. She had never before paid much attention to such matters, but once she considered the proposition of war, she came rapidly to an opposite conclusion from her husband. She was sure that this was not a war which would be won by propaganda media. It would be won by guns, and she was not inclined to shrug off the military record of the Axis to date.

During the first six months of the war, with nothing but news of continued defeat of Allied arms coming in, Letia was almost convinced that there was no hope. She experienced a sense of real and physical fear. There would be a Japanese invasion of the West Coast; German submarines would make the Atlantic untenable.

At first, Letia tried to give her point of view to Sturges, but for once her husband was too full of his own affairs to listen seriously. He had a boyish confidence in the invincibility of American arms. Now that Roosevelt had made his peace with the industrialists, no force could counter American production, provided organizations like Facts, Inc., were still there to explain it all, to whip up enthusiasm.

Letia was soon disgusted with him. She found that she had soured on the whole institution of publishing. American publishers, personally, had been too insecure to save the country from a Roosevelt-led rabble. They fought too much among

themselves. They were really small men, as easily frightened over nothing as her husband had been when the bankers had said "Boo." The whole episode of the threatened foreclosure of Sturges' loan was typical of the way the rich in America fought amongst themselves—fought amongst themselves at the very hour when their house was burning. She saw that the war had saved them all, from themselves as well as from Roosevelt.

In the beginning, Letia suspected that Roosevelt had got America committed on the wrong side. As far as she was concerned, many of Hitler's policies had made sense, and had she been aware of such a thing at the time of its heyday, she would certainly have joined General Woods' "America First" organization. But as her fear of Allied defeats in the field mounted, she reversed herself and concluded that the course of history had proved Roosevelt right for once. It would not have been possible for America to have allied itself with individuals as ambitious as Hitler and Hirohito. The power of these men had first to be destroyed, and *then* America could take under its own wing the elements that had brought Fascism or Nazism or whatever they called it into power.

Letia had plenty of time to think about these things, not only because her husband had deserted her for his war work but also because she had ended the task of setting up his establishments and she was really again as idle as she had been those terrible weeks in Nevada.

She now saw clearly that she wanted to get into the war effort herself. She *had* to get into the war effort; even her physical survival seemed dependent on it. She could not risk trusting her fate to men like Sturges, and she was sure that most of the country's civilian administrators were as romantic and unrealistic as he. So she began, quite naturally, to interest herself in the fighting men.

To Letia, of course, the important fighting men were the generals. It was not hard for her to meet them. As Sturges' wife, and because she was a much prettier visitor than Eleanor Roosevelt, she found herself well received in their offices and camps. Her second appearances, however, were somewhat tenser than her first, for the good generals and admirals were not apt to forget the uncomfortable hours she had given them, asking the kind of pointed questions she might have asked a manufacturer who had wanted to sell goods to Long House.

How did they *know* they were going to be able to make an army which could defeat one of Hitler's? How much would it cost? What kind of material was going into it? How well would it wear?

Letia began to be a student not only of reviews and inspections but also of maneuvers, and there were a number of conferences held behind closed doors in Washington on the subject of how to handle her inquisitiveness.

It was the happy thought of a sophisticated New Yorker who had become aide to a lieutenant general that Letia's old sidekick, Orlando Hicks, was now under the Army's command. He had closed his public relations office to accept a commission to work in the same field and to be near his beloved generals. Lieutenant Colonel Hicks was assigned to be Letia's guide—and guardian.

It did not take Letia long to progress up the chain of command to the Commander-in-Chief himself, and her first meeting with President Roosevelt was very different from her husband's. Sturges had been on the receiving end of a booming welcome and of some skillful questioning into where he stood and how he would use the power of his publications. Letia had swept by Pa Watson in the anteroom and had opened fire herself, from point-blank range, before the President had got through concluding that she was as pretty a girl as she had been represented. It was the spring of 1943 and a transcript of her questions might have given the F.B.I. a thing or two to think about. Her insistence on knowing why the Americans had not yet landed on the Continent might have confused them into thinking she was a Communist fellow-traveler, anxious about a second front. Actually, all she wanted was action, but she knew she wanted that.

If Letia had been a little less insistent, the directness and intelligence of her questions would have interested Roosevelt and he might have experimented with putting her talents to work; but she irritated him, personally, and made him anxious lest she get out of him some knowledge of the actual plans for an invasion that he was in the midst of discussing with Churchill and the British Imperial General Staff.

When Letia had gone, Roosevelt called for Watson and said, "Phew! Pa, don't ever let that woman in here again. I almost turned the Army over to her."

The unfortunate impression Letia made on the President,

and G-2's growing concern for how much of what was going on was being collected in her pretty head, resulted in an elaborate plan for getting and keeping her out of the country. Lieutenant Colonel Hicks was given the mission of accomplishing it. It was not difficult for him to persuade Letia to visit the battlefields themselves, for all that her contact with the military was providing was a conversational outlet for her aggression. She had a lot more to work off. Around Washington they had come to joke about Letia as "the needle woman of the war," she had pricked so many prides.

Thus it came about that not long after her visit to the White House, Letia found herself en route to Africa with Lieutenant Colonel Hicks in charge of the party. She traveled as a special correspondent of her husband's papers. Thereafter Letia was rarely in America and, great as was the hardship of leaving Susan and her secretaries behind, she got to like being the guest of various headquarters abroad.

Letia was quite conscious of the fact that brigadier generals were temporarily moved from their quarters to make accommodations for her, and she enjoyed riding past the professional correspondents, doubled up in the limited facilities of a jeep, in the general's own car—often with the stars uncovered and the general himself at her side. When she was in the midst of a camp of armed men, Letia's sensations of physical fear left her, and during the occasional air raids she encountered, she was notably cool and self-composed. She took great pride in having been bombed and, when she had time, she wrote Sturges all about her experiences.

Orlando, who had a different reaction to air raids, got his own satisfactions out of being Letia's companion. He had more faith in her as a tactician than in the generals whom she visited. The real live generals he had at last met did not measure up to his dream characters, so he believed sincerely that the advice Letia gave them freely had made a material contribution to the victories they subsequently achieved.

Orlando felt personally responsible for making Letia's natural talents available; he knew how to handle her. From long years of experience, he always drew the worst venom of her criticism from her personally before ushering her into the presence of an Eisenhower or a Bradley or a Patton. Thus he often saved them from being disconcerted by the feline savageness with which she would otherwise have recom-

mended that they sacrifice a few thousand lives to impress the enemy with the prestige of American arms.

Among the generals whom she met, Letia as well as Orlando found no supermen. She admired Patton's blood-thirstiness and was almost captivated by his charm, but he said too many stupid little things in casual conversation to reassure her. She had, of course, no knowledge of armored tactics which would let her appreciate his real genius. Bradley puzzled her because she had sense enough to see that his gentle shyness was deceptive, but she could not put her finger on whatever it was in him that made her respectful despite herself. She got on well with Eisenhower, but his ability to double-talk her away from the point enraged her and he was too patently cautious a man, and kept his chin too well covered, to suit her.

In the other theater, where she made her second and third trips into the field, she was more impressed with MacArthur, but having been on the European front first, she agreed with the High Command that that was where the war must really be won. The Pacific admirals were her fondest target, for she had always on the tip of her tongue the right prewar quotation of what the American Navy had thought of the Japanese, and here they were, these grown men, sitting in their steel hulks, letting the Japanese hide from them.

By the end of the war, Letia had been in the field so much that she began to revise her opinion of who won wars. All the generals and the admirals together, with the single exception of Patton, seemed to her to keep themselves too far from where the actual fighting was. Besides, having run out of high headquarters to visit, she found herself moving nearer and nearer to one front or another. Here the headquarters of corps and divisional commanders, and the commanders of task forces, were more anxious to get her out among the troops, in rest areas at least, where her very presence might relieve the monotony. In these areas, the actress in her was rewarded. Even in the long khaki pants and the paratrooper boots she had made for her, she was a figure to whistle at and to cheer.

Letia's appearance with her own personal staff of Orlando, one of the general's aides, and the local commander, was a better show than most that the USO and the Red Cross provided, for she did not appear briefly on a stage but spent her time going among them. And instead of entertaining, she

asked *them* to entertain *her*, which made the soldiers feel important. They were gratified.

Orlando thought what an imperfect world it was because, had Letia been the general in command, he felt that they would gladly have died for her, and perhaps the soldiers themselves felt that way while they were still resting and in no immediate danger of being killed. Listening to Letia explain to Higher Headquarters how the war should be conducted, Orlando also maintained his opinion that she would have made the best commander of them all.

And so the war passed, with Letia and Sturges spending most of it several thousand miles apart. Psychologically, they were even further away from each other. In New York and Washington there was gossip, now and then, that they were separating legally, because Letia's trips were so well publicized and it was known that, to simplify his life, Sturges had moved to a suite in the Ritz a few blocks across town from *Facts'* offices. But there was never anything in these rumors, which were purely speculative. If Letia and Sturges could not escape the fact that they were no longer lovers, they could blame history for that; and neither of them had any reason to be discontented with being married to the other.

Sturges was proud of the active part that Letia seemed to him to be playing in the war, and he was even a little wistful that the administration of *Facts'* affairs denied him the luxury of joining her. Not even Harry Luce or President Roosevelt had a wife who was doing more or who was better known for it.

As his life settled into a routine that began to be monotonous, Sturges sought diversion again in the side streets off Fifth Avenue, and he was not technically faithful. But, as always, he took extraordinary precautions to be discreet and, once again, he had no sensations whatever of guilt. He added only one new curlicue to the pattern of his behavior. Whereas, when Mary had been his wife, he had taken great pride in the fact that the women in his private life were all exceptionally pretty, now he sought consciously for the drab and the undistinguished. This was because, when in Letia's absence he first felt himself tempted, he decided that the only thing he had to fear from his clandestine relationships would be falling in love again.

Looking back on the fading memories of Albuquerque,

Sturges recalled that experience with as much pain as wonder. He was sure he did not want to risk any similar experience. Therefore the woman who served his purpose best would be one who was amiable but quite clearly no threat to his emotional security.

This all fitted together very nicely because taking such a woman unto himself was not merely a safeguard to his peace of mind but was also an act of loyalty to Letia. He was sure that she could not possibly be hurt by, or jealous of, such an attachment. He omitted one other consideration from his thoughts; his association with such inconspicuous females, some of whom were so far on the wrong side as to be almost ugly, was a wonderful assurance against the spread of gossip. Among his secretaries and closest assistants, it was generally concluded that he could not possibly be really interested in the women with whom he was occasionally, and by inadvertence, seen lunching or dining.

Letia herself was not so gossip-proof, and she had only to spend more than a few days at the headquarters of an important general for his name to be linked with hers. Had she been the mistress of all the important people with whom she was rumored in bed, she would have ended the war the greatest camp follower in history. Actually she had never belonged, even momentarily, to any of them.

The woman whom Sturges had awakened in her had been driven back, by the successive impacts of her disillusionment during the financial crisis and the shock of the war itself, far beyond the range of any emotional artillery that was brought to bear on her. The generals and the admirals and the field marshals with whom she came in contact were far too full of other things for more than the most casual flirtation. The aides and idlers at headquarters who had ambitious ideas were no more than an irritation to her, comparable to the irritation of the indifferent cooking in the field and the long nights of huddling uncomfortably in the seat of an aircraft crossing an ocean. She shooed away such attentions as she shooed away flies.

The only emotional image that moved Letia during the war was the image of physical fear that her first misgivings might prove sound and that the nation of which she was a part would be defeated and have the will of foreigners imposed upon it—and upon her. When, in the later stages of the

war, she saw how the rich and powerful of Europe had been stripped and humbled by the devastation of war, she knew that she had been right to have been concerned about what might have happened to her, and the basis of her life, if the enemy had won.

Otherwise, however, Letia was untouched by all the experience to which she had been a witness and, when it was over, she came back to Sturges in very much the same frame of mind as any soldier who had been away a long time in a noncombatant occupation, wondering what the other person who bore his name was really like, trying to recall feelings that had been felt long ago, but utterly unable to bring them back, simply because so much time had passed and the layers of recent memories were so thick and of such varied stuff.

Having lived, now, two wholly separate lives for three long years, Letia and Sturges seemed momentarily to have nothing in common with each other except their common name. And then came the reunion.

*The Revelations of St. Sturges*

STURGES WAS IN much better shape than Letia to think about things after the war was over. The faithful Fairstreet had begun getting together some kind of a personal staff for them even before V-E Day and soon both the duplex on Park Avenue and the rented house at Westbury were open again, albeit manned with cripples and elderly women. Sturges moved out of his wartime encampment in the Ritz and began to have a pleasant sense of participation in getting everything ready for Letia's return. She was now gone again to MacArthur's headquarters, to be sure to be in at the death.

Sturges tried to recall the little things that pleased his wife, but Susan, who had been brought out of retirement, was better at it than he. Susan assured him that the thing that Letia liked most was to have so much of everything around her that she was never inconvenienced when she stretched out her hand for anything. Together they stacked up the closets with a kind of a second trousseau, the game being to find anything for sale now that was worthy of being included. Sturges himself made notable contributions to Susan's inventory when he made his first postwar visit to devastated Europe with other publishers. The prices in Paris were fantastic, but he was assured that he was getting the proper quality and Letia would surely be the first woman in America with a complete Parisian wardrobe.

Falkenstall had long since liquidated Sturges' loans, and Sturges' share of the annual dividends from Facts, Inc., were now indeed more than adequate. It was true that the tax picture had so changed that he was only able to keep a very few hundreds of thousands of the millions he made every year—he had already begun to be bitter on the subject—but during the war his own personal expenses had been so reduced that he could not begin to spend even the income that was left him.

After he got back from Europe, Sturges bought Letia a number of jewels, picking them out himself and preparing to surprise her, as on a Christmas morning, with a whole pile of

gifts. He also replenished his own wardrobe with suits his tailor made for him from the woollens he brought back from England. After examining his figure in the glass, he engaged a retired athlete to come up to the apartment every morning to lead him in his setting-up exercises.

All these things Sturges did because for the moment he could think of nothing better to do with his life than to set the stage for Letia's permanent return. But as the summer weeks passed, and the back of the job of getting ready for Letia was broken, he found that time hung increasingly heavy on his hands. The last of his wartime companions had drifted away—her husband had been transferred from Staten Island—and he was quite alone in the world. He was long since too august a figure for friendships at Facts, Inc. He and the other publishers and millionaires he knew sniffed suspiciously at each other, mistrusting any gesture of friendliness as including ulterior motives. From his past, Sturges retained a relationship of intimacy only with Falkenstall, and this was a curiously semi-formal affair in which half the time they were more lawyer and important client than two men whose fates had been more or less linked for many years.

Letia and Facts, Inc., had been the dominant connections in Falkenstall's life for a long time now, although he was still nominally associated with Wood, Wickersham. The legal business of the publishing house was so important to Wood, Wickersham that they could afford to let Falkenstall draw down his full partner's share and still take little interest in other clients. So Falkenstall himself could not have said whether the evenings he spent with Sturges were personal or professional. Even if Sturges had been less dependent on him than he was, Falkenstall would have had good reason for waiting on him and for encouraging his confidences. But when the time came for Sturges to unburden himself, Falkenstall was there in the role of the most intimate confidant that Sturges now had.

The process by which Sturges arrived at intimacy was that, as the demands for his attention to *Facts'* affairs lessened, the necessity for another outlet for his personality grew. In the idleness that followed preparation for Letia's return, Sturges became again introspective and thoughtful and began to wonder, as he had not wondered in a dozen years, what his life was all about.

He was the proprietor of the richest and most successful pair of publications in the country. Everyone agreed that the war had strengthened their position. *Fantasy* was solidly established and its only problem was finding customers with markets large enough to justify their paying the rates asked for its advertising. Yet Sturges could not say to himself that all this gave him any great satisfaction. He was actually tired from the years of wrestling with details; he no longer got the satisfaction he once had from being wined and dined in Washington for the publicity his papers might give either the government or its political opponents.

Facts, Inc., had maintained its shrewd neutrality on any issue which might alienate any reader, and its only position was one of frank admiration for accomplishment. It was difficult for even the radicals to find fault with this. The two magazines that Facts, Inc., published were both very satisfying commercially, but the publications themselves, and Sturges' relationship to them, were a long cry from either the days when he was inspired to contribute to the literature of the world or the period when he toyed with the idea of out-Hearsting Hearst, even of buying out Hearst and using a mighty publishing empire to impress his will on the destiny of the nation.

For Sturges, then, there was nothing in the Facts, Inc. that emerged at the end of the war except a large office in which people were either too polite to him or too irritatingly dependent, and a source of revenue, most of which the wartime government took. What had he got for so many years of effort? He was boxed by his thoughts into the conclusion that there was only Letia. He began to think of what she meant to him. His new loneliness, and all the excitement of preparing for her, made him feel again almost in love with her. At least he knew that he wanted her back with him more than anything in the world. And when she got back, what would it be like? It was here that his evening with Falkenstall began.

Falkenstall was not a man to betray confidences easily. Sturges felt safe in talking to him. Falkenstall's whole career had been based on his ability to keep what he knew to himself, so there is no record that the lawyer even spoke of that evening to his wife. To himself, however, he always referred to what he learned as the Revelations according to Saint

Sturges; and even though he was never frank enough to admit what he knew, the knowledge he gained that evening was the basis of the talk he later had with Colonel Orlando Hicks. Both he and Hicks recognized that they had special knowledge of the two great ones which no one else in the world shared with them.

The Revelations according to Saint Sturges began the week before the atom bomb exploded over Hiroshima, in the evening of the day that Letia had sent a cable giving the actual date of her return. The decorators were doing something to both the drawing rooms so that, after their dinner alone, Sturges and Falkenstall were forced into the library, that little room in which Sturges had had his scene with Letia so long ago. Here the decor, which was principally the pine paneling, was unchanged, and the Davidson head of Letia still stood by the fireplace, as chaste and beautiful and coldly collected as ever.

The new chef's dinner had been excellent; Sturges had ordered that champagne be opened to celebrate the news of Letia's homecoming. Now Falkenstall was aware that this was not just any evening, but that Sturges was in a mood which was unique for him. It was a mood in which he wanted to talk not about the business of his company nor about world affairs nor the coming end of the war, nor even about his wife, Letia, but about himself.

It was Sturges' practice to call most of his associates by their last name and only rarely and self-consciously did he speak, even to Falkenstall, by his first. Now he began as if he had already made a decision to promote his guest from lawyer to friend by saying, "Well, here we are, Jim. What do we think of ourselves now we're almost forty?"

Falkenstall composed himself, looked reflectively at the cigar he had lit, noted the brandy which the butler had left, felt the solid security that the architect and decorator had built into this rich man's library, and said nothing.

Sturges said, "You know, I haven't talked about myself for a long time, but you won't mind if I do tonight?"

"I couldn't be more comfortable, Sturges," said his lawyer. "As far as I'm concerned, old man, you have all night."

"I think it's going to take all night," said Sturges, and in the end it did.

"You know, you can't think about what things mean to

you," Sturges began, "unless you go way, way back. Way back to what things meant to you when you were small—before things happened to you. I was thinking at dinner—when you were talking about different things—things that had nothing to do with it—about how I felt when I was a little boy. You know, I didn't want all this," he went on. "All I wanted in the world was to please God—I mean really to make God happy about me. Nobody told me what God was, but I knew there were lots of things about me that wouldn't please Him and I wanted to do something about them."

"Like what, Sturges old man?" said Falkenstall.

"Oh, Christ," said Sturges, "you don't know when you're a kid. You're just unhappy about not being something you aren't, and have all kinds of thoughts that scare hell out of you, only after you've had them you can't remember what they were. All I know is I wanted to be worthy of God. I must have had a terrific faith in God to want so much to be worthy of Him."

Falkenstall made no comment at this juncture and Sturges talked on for a while, working himself around to his point.

"What I got out of thinking back about how I felt then, Jim, is that I was alive then—really alive and *feeling*—because I had a real faith. None of the boys I knew had it. The people who taught me at Sunday school certainly didn't have it—but *I* knew I had it. And if I had been able to make something of that faith, I would be somebody that gave me some satisfaction today."

Sturges said this so calmly, and seemed so at home with the thought, that Falkenstall felt he could put a logical question without being disconcerting.

He said, "What happened to it, old man?"

"Well, I can't regret it," said Sturges. "It just went. Somewhere in the process of growing out of short pants, I guess."

Then he leaped up from the sofa where he had been sitting opposite Falkenstall and strode over to speak to him with great intensity.

He said, "Don't you see that I *can't* regret it, Jim, because there was no possible way for me to hold on to it. What I mean is that it was the first faith I ever had and I couldn't know how important it was. I couldn't set a proper value on it. Don't you see that?"

"I'm not arguing with you," said Falkenstall. "I just wanted to know."

"All right, God damn it, and I'm going to tell you," Sturges said furiously. "But it won't do you any good to try to quote me or to try to explain it to anybody else because I'll deny that I said any of this to you and tell people you're a liar and made it up."

"Easy there," said Falkenstall, suddenly alarmed. "In the first place, you haven't told me anything and in the second place, if you *had* said anything personal, why in the world would I ever want to talk to anybody about it?"

"All right," said Sturges, who was snarling now from the intensity of the inner conflict in him. "Not even Letia. I'm going to go on telling *you*—if you have sense enough to understand—because I want some advice from you. I need help from you."

He went back to the little sofa now and hunched down into a corner of it.

"I couldn't do anything about what I felt about God because I didn't know how important it was. I was a kid then, see? But then I got it again a second time."

"A feeling for God?" asked Falkenstall.

"No, no, no! I just *told* you that I lost what I felt about God. What I mean is that I got a faith in something outside myself again. First it was in God and I lost it, and then it was in putting words together to make writing. Now you're looking dumber than ever—and I've *got* to make you understand this before you can help me."

For a long time then Sturges tried to explain what he meant, now rising to pace back and forth, now dropping himself like a sack of meal in the easy chair on the opposite side of the fireplace or back in the sofa. It was as difficult for Falkenstall to follow Sturges as it had been once upon a time for Allen Bishop. It was even worse. The memory of what he felt about writing was not as clear to Sturges as the memory of his faith in God. It had been some factor of his wonder and his excitement over the young poets whom he had known in Yale as friends of Allen Bishop's. It was something Allen Bishop had made him feel, but he did not think that Allen himself had it.

"Maybe he had it but I don't feel I ever really understood Al." But what he meant was surely something that

great writers felt, that justified their existence to themselves, and all the pain they experienced, making themselves so sensitive to life.

Falkenstall thought finally that he understood what Sturges was trying to describe—but not Sturges' own relationship to it.

"But you never were a writer, Sturges," he interjected. "I know you used to write pieces for your magazine—but you weren't a writer in the sense you're talking about."

"That's it; that's it," said Sturges. "I've made you see now. I got as far as knowing what it could mean—but it got away from me."

Now he was pacing up and down again.

"Of course, the first thing I realized was that I was never going even to try to be a writer. I don't know—it would have meant a whole new start in life, and I was already committed to publishing the magazine before I left college. But then I said to myself, 'There are all kinds of freaks in the Holy Order. There are men who are all godliness and there are men who serve God by making it possible for the others to serve Him, and for God to have great cathedrals.' I thought then that that was what I would be to literature. I would be the man who made the cathedrals possible. The magazines I published would be the magazines which had faith in the importance of writers."

By this time, Sturges had burned off some of the intensity of his feeling and Falkenstall felt a genuine thrill of intimacy. He spoke for the first time not as a lawyer but simply as the friend that Sturges had appointed him.

"But, Sturges, *Facts* could never have been anything like that."

"I know, I know," said Sturges. "You are beginning to understand how difficult it all was. I thought of making *Facts* into that magazine—of getting that kind of writer for it. When the idea for putting in editorials and stuff came along, I thought it was going to happen. But I never seemed to be able to get aboard the thing. It all went too fast. No, it didn't really go too fast. What happened, of course, was that we had to struggle too hard to be a success. We had to make too much money."

Suddenly he snapped his fingers.

He said, "I see it now. I let what I felt about God go by

. . . and then . . . then I let this other faith go, too. Same thing. Just on a different scale."

Falkenstall was sure that Sturges was wholly sincere about this, even if the details of it were still a little unclear in conversation. If Sturges had lived the faith he had felt, perhaps he could have said it better, but it seemed as if he were now trying to say that he had been more interested in the building of a temple than in the spiritual values it might contain.

"Now, that's my life so far, Jim," Sturges went on. "The first time I let it go, I couldn't be expected to know. But the second time I should have known. And that's why you've got to help me, because this third time I can't fail."

"Yes?" Falkenstall said. "This third time?"

"This third time, it's Letia," said Sturges. "I've finally understood. It's the same thing that I had twice before and lost, only this time it's all the things there are put together. And God damn it, Jim, it's starting just the way it did before. I had it whole when I met Letia, and then, before the war, something happened and I lost it. But the important thing, Jim, is that this time I get another chance. I don't feel it now but I know that it was there—and that Letia felt it just as much as I did—and she's coming back and we've got to find it again—together."

Falkenstall thought to himself, "The poor devil." It was an instinctive reaction to his first thought of how Letia would feel about such a talk. There was something about Sturges' face that made the lawyer's sympathy turn from his client to himself. In a second of frankness, he said to himself, "Sturges is right. He's talking about something I don't know about," and he felt in himself an immediate desire to be helpful, not for gains but simply for the sake of being helpful. He felt anxious to play some useful part in the love story into which he had been invited. He had never known that Sturges could have experienced such mysteries. He felt momentarily humbled and ashamed of always having been so worldly himself.

Falkenstall was so moved, in fact, by what he saw in Sturges, that he had none of the sense of anticlimax that he would have felt under other circumstances when Sturges dropped from the altitude of his emotions to the practical reality of the earth below. Without any apparent consciousness of a shift in his position, Sturges began to talk in his most reportorial manner of what his life with Letia had been like

and of how he wished, starting anew, to remove every imperfection from it.

He said, "Now the important thing is to go back to when we both thought it was perfect and see what was the matter then."

He omitted any mention of the discussion that had taken place there in the library where they were talking and, as if aware that the omission must be conspicuous, he added, "I'll assume that anything that happened after that was my own fault."

To himself, Sturges must have then thought that Letia could not have made the loan to him because he was already unworthy of her faith. To Falkenstall he said aloud, "I've got to try to get it down to the homeliest terms. I've got to make you see . . . so you can help me. Now take when we were on our honeymoon."

Falkenstall wondered how far Sturges was going in his revelations.

"When we were on our honeymoon—out in New Mexico—the time came when we had to make up our minds about *Fantasy*. Were we going to start it? Weren't we going to start it? So I sent for the boys and they came out and Letia was simply marvelous. She was the perfect hostess. She made them all feel at home; she was interested in what they had to tell me and she drew them out. In a way, she couldn't have been a better wife. But, Jim, the point of the story is that I told her all about *Fantasy* and she knew it was important to me to make up my mind about it but *it never occurred to her* to suggest getting hold of the boys. *I* was the one who had to ask them."

He wrestled with bringing what bothered him into sharper relief.

"Now if we had *really* been one, Jim—if we'd really been whole—she would have known what was important to me so well—just instinctively—that she would have done the right things and got hold of the right people for me—without my asking it of her.

"And it was like that after we got back to New York. I liked the idea of going on running the magazines from wherever we lived—and she was wonderful about it—but . . . *I* was the one who *always* had to arrange things. Now you tell me. You know a lot more about women than I do—why

weren't we so close that she would just do these things for me naturally?"

All of Falkenstall's intelligence was concentrated on the conversation, but he could not get at what was bothering Sturges about Letia's behavior.

Seeing this, Sturges gave several more examples. With each story he seemed to be trying to say that while Letia was a perfect woman, she was a woman apart from him, that he expected some kind of a merger of soul that was more intimate than Falkenstall could conceive of.

It seemed to puzzle Sturges, too. He was aware that he could not get his finger on the moral he was trying to preach. Finally, in desperation, he said, "Look, there's one thing that's clear in all this. If I never got much out of Facts, Inc., Letia gets even less. I think I'll give it all up, Jim. I think I'll just spend the rest of my life trying to find what I've lost with Letia."

The importance of the thought seemed to grow in Sturges and at last, thumping one hand against the palm of the other, he said, "That's the answer to the whole thing. Everything I've done has been pointless—except," naïvely, "that it's made a lot of money for me—so now I'll quit and devote the rest of my life to nothing but Letia."

Falkenstall whistled to himself. He thought, "Well, maybe this is the way it happened in the Middle Ages when a baron joined the church and became a monk—this is Sturges' own twist—so, why not?—they say God is love; perhaps love is God." He thought Sturges the least likely convert he knew. Suddenly he realized that he was now being called upon to be more than a sympathetic audience.

"All right, you plan it," he heard Sturges saying to him, "I mean the scenario. You tell me what I should do. You know what I want to do now. You know what I'm trying to do. You know what I want to get out of life. Shall I quit *Facts* now, before she comes back? Shall I make the boys a present of it?"

Falkenstall rallied himself. It was one thing to wonder whether Sturges might not truly be in search of a Holy Grail that he, Jim Falkenstall, was too coarse to understand; it was another to be a party to the liquidation of one of the great worldly careers of his time. Few men of his generation had acquired so much power or amassed so many dollars as his

friend and client, Sturges Strong; and now Sturges was proposing to abdicate for no earthly reason, without even being asked.

Falkenstall said, "Sturges, I don't know why you say I know more about women than you do—unless you think they all cry on lawyers' shoulders, which they don't. But I know that Letia is proud of you—and of what you've done and who you are—and that's something, from a woman who has known as many important men as Letia has. I can't see where you'd get anywhere, giving it all up for her—when you haven't any reason to think she wants you to give it up."

"It isn't that I think she wants me to give it up. It's that if I give it up I'll have nothing ever again to distract me from making her happy," Sturges grumbled. "Or she, me. Wouldn't she see that?"

"Well, of course, you could tell her," said Falkenstall, "but I've never run into anything quite like this before."

"Well, any way you look at it, I'm going to take her away with me when she comes back," said Sturges.

Falkenstall saw that Sturges' jaw was set and that the look on his face had some resemblance to his look of determination when he had told Falkenstall to tell the directors to go to hell. Lawyer-like, Falkenstall's suggestion to Sturges was that he go ahead with his resolve to take Letia away from it all, but that he not commit himself to retiring as a publisher until he found out whether it would solve his problem.

"Good," Sturges said, reaching over to pat him on the knee. "Good man. That's my medicine. And you're the only one who will know that I may never come back—that if I can find what I had with Letia, I'll never come back."

It had been a very long conversation—much longer than it takes to tell—because Sturges had gone off into so many amplifications and there had been long periods when they had paused in the discussion to sit gloomily across the room from one another in silence.

The butler had come again and gone around midnight, leaving fresh ice and decanters of whisky and brandy. It was almost morning when Sturges reached his decision. Falkenstall was so tired physically that he felt the exertion itself was a substantial price to pay for the confidences of the great. But he was not through.

Once he had made his decision, Sturges seemed like a new

man, fresh and vigorous. Falkenstall was forced into a role he had always done his best to avoid—the role not of counselor but of super-personal secretary.

"You're the only man who will ever be in on this," said Sturges. "I don't want anyone at *Facts* to have anything to do with it—not even Fairstreet. I want you to find me a place, somewhere. I want you to make all the arrangements."

It occurred to Falkenstall to take advantage of his position by suggesting that it would be good for Sturges' soul to do some of his own arranging some time, but in the end he sat himself obediently at the desk with the green leather top and made whole pages of notes on Sturges' chastely engraved writing paper. After a series of eliminations, they fixed on Brazil as the right country in which to recapture love. Neither of them had been there but both of them were sure that rich coffee planters had fabulous places along the Atlantic coast either near Rio or at the mouth of the Santos River to the south. *Fantasy* had once done a take-out on how rich Brazilians live.

They need not wait for Japan to be defeated. They both agreed that the war was practically over and that there would be no difficulty for Sturges and Letia about passports. Sturges would announce that he was taking a year's Sabbatical leave. Falkenstall thought that this could be dressed up to warn off any of his own executives who dreamt of usurping Sturges' power, and besides, what danger was there in their dreams anyway, for there was simply not enough stock out of Sturges' hands for anyone to be able to threaten his legal position?

When they finally parted and the sky was lightening over the East River, it was all settled.

It remained settled and no important change was made in the program. V-J Day came while the last arrangements for the loan of a suitable estate were being concluded.

To Letia, the news that Sturges babbled to her in the car on the way in from the airport was at once pleasant and confusing. She was really glad to see her husband; she had been three months on her final trip, and only with him a week or two before *that* trip, after the trip that preceded it. It had been a long time since she had thought at all personally of him. Sturges was a permanent part of her life, and since

nothing had happened in the war years that put any emotional strain on their marriage, she took as a matter of course that they would make a postwar life together. As soon as she had felt the war won, she had relaxed into a kind of traveler's coma, letting the hours and the miles go by, unthinking of the journey's end, hypnotized by the motion itself.

Letia was confused by the news that she and Sturges were going to spend a year together in Brazil—that was all of what had been planned that she got from that first telling—simply because it was such a wholly new idea. But as she turned it over in her mind there were many things about it that she found appealing. She was genuinely tired of important talk and was experiencing her own brand of war-weariness. She was in a passive mood in which play appealed to her, and what she gathered was that Sturges was proposing to spend a year playing with her.

Sturges did not seem as strange to her as Letia had expected, thinking about it on the last leg of the trip home. He was gentler than she remembered him and a little more relaxed. She also found him more entertaining, for he had knowledge of how people in New York and Washington felt about what she had seen shaping in the field and, tired as she was of the war, her interest in it had yet to wind down completely.

So together they could not have made a better impression on the people who saw them on their way on the plane for Miami. There they would pick up the Pan-American plane for Rio.

Chief among these were Falkenstall and Hicks, the latter still in uniform, now wearing the insignia of a full colonel. His promotion was a reward for the successful accomplishment of his military mission of keeping Letia occupied. Everyone who had remained with Sturges and Letia through their various crises seemed to have taken the afternoon off to bid them *bon voyage*, but Letia and Sturges had spiritually left all but the lawyer and the press agent many years before.

After the last pictures of the departing plane had been snapped, and the reporters and photographers and friends and employees had dispersed, Falkenstall and Hicks, as if by pre-arrangement, walked together into the terminal at La Guardia, mounted the curving steps, and sought the glass-rimmed room where the circular bar is. Here they found a table by the win-

dow and sat together for a little while. After they had finished two drinks, Hicks said to Falkenstall, "What's been with the Sturgeon since we've been away?"

Falkenstall considered his third whisky and soda and barely resisted the temptation to acquire a confidant himself.

"I think he missed Letia," he said, cautiously.

"She didn't miss him," said Orlando, almost proudly. "She's the kind of a girl that other people miss but she doesn't do much missing herself."

"That's too bad," said Falkenstall, finishing his drink and trying to get the attention of a waitress to bring him another. He liked Orlando, and if he were not going to confide in him, he could at least get the lowdown on what had happened to Letia so that he could make his own estimate on the odds of Sturges' success.

"Why is that too bad?" said Orlando. "It doesn't matter if she didn't miss him. He's got her back now, hasn't he?"

"You don't believe in love, Orlando, do you?" Falkenstall laughed.

"Sure," said Orlando. "I've come across it often."

"Well, Sturges and Letia used to be very much in love with each other," said Falkenstall, feeling out of character speaking so seriously of something that could not be translated into legal terminology.

"Yeah, I know," said Orlando. "I've been through it with her twice. But, thank God, she gets over it. She's a wonderful dame when she's not in love."

Now Falkenstall laughed again. "You're a one-woman dog, Orlando," he said.

"Why not?" said the press agent in the colonel's uniform. "She's always made sense to me—except when she's been in love. Frankly, after four Scotches, I'm admitting here—and this is a military confidence—that I don't think much of your man Strong. He's not in Letia's class."

"He could be," said Falkenstall. "He really could be. Between you and me—and let's make it five Scotches—and I've known your friend Letia almost as long as you have—he's got it in him to take her apart and put her together again. I've seen him tough. And if he puts her together again—feeling the way he does about her—he'll put her together again right."

"What do you mean 'right'?" said Orlando belligerently.

"I mean put her together as a human being," said Falkenstall, coming very close to a revelation of his real feelings. "I mean put her together again as a woman, in a way she'll stay woman—and stop trying to be—damn it, I don't know what she's always wanted to be unless maybe it's General of the Armies."

"Ahh," said Orlando, "now you're on the beam all right. That's just exactly what she ought to be—a five-star general. And what five-star general needs a God-damned husband?"

"You know why they're really going to Rio, don't you?" Falkenstall couldn't resist at least one punch line. "They're going to Rio to see if Sturges can't get to be the general himself again."

"So-o-o," Orlando sucked the word in, his fat face arranging itself in a look of exaggerated speculation. "So-o-o . . . that's what it's all about."

"It's what it's all about," said Falkenstall smugly, "and nobody would bet on it on form, but I'm one who would like to see it work. I'm one who thinks there's a lot more to my client than you do. I tell you he's never been able to get himself opened up wide, but if he ever does, your beautiful protégée is going to have some new experiences and like 'em. Damn it, I don't know why I'm talking like this. But I'd like to see the old boy make good."

"Well, for my money he's been a son of a bitch net all his life, but if you say no, it's all right with me," said Orlando. "You're his lawyer and I wouldn't cross you about what goes on inside him—but he had Letia jumping through hoops once and he couldn't keep her that way. You've got to show me, pal."

"All right," said the lawyer, "I'll tell you what we'll do. There's a pretty good chance that when they do come back you and I will be there, to meet them. Maybe it will be here; maybe it will be some place else. Wherever it is, this is a date for you and me to talk it over after we've seen them home to bed."

A slow smile illuminated the speaker's face.

"And I'll go this far with you, my fat friend. If it's happened—well, that night I'll tell you how it happened—and maybe you'll get to understand something that isn't phonied up for a press release."

Falkenstall went on smiling and then said to himself but aloud, "And maybe there's a thing or two I could learn from them myself."

Having thus run themselves out of things they cared to say to each other, the lawyer and the press agent parted company.

*Victory*

THE YEAR THAT Sturges spent away from it, Facts, Inc., got on very nicely. In the first months of postwar shortages, the steps that had been taken so long ago to insure its supply of raw materials paid off a second time. Sturges' having kept his staff intact through the war gave his organization a still greater advantage over its competitors. Schulberg and Brennan were cocks of the roost now. *Fantasy's* earnings made the publishing of *Facts*, *The Knowing Weekly*, a venture that needed to continue only for sentimental reasons. Yet *The Knowing Weekly* itself had never made as much money.

Facts, Inc., in truth, was so well heeled that the editors of its various publications were now in a position to indulge their crotchets without fear for the cost. They were almost all of them rich men now and the old prewar tradition of editorial neutrality on political issues began to slip away. As rich men they began to have positive ideas on the subject of the iniquity of the income tax, the threat of trade unions to the American way, and, most strongly of all, the menace of a communistic movement backed by the armed communistic state of Soviet Russia.

The transition from neutrality to partisanship was not difficult and was not painful. The war itself had really destroyed the old objectivity, sanctioning as it did a patriotic bias to the handling of all kinds of news. Roosevelt was dead and the inevitable reaction had set in. Now patriotism and anti-New Dealism could be represented as synonymous.

The only part that Sturges himself played in this drift was to sanction it in the occasional cables he sent back from Brazil. For practical purposes, the development of the Strong publications was complete and no further growth was now indicated. They would continue in their place of eminence until their proprietors began to decay of their own affluence and could be pushed out of the way by other young men, as their generation had pushed great publications like *The Literary Digest* out of the way after the First World War. Already

the principal figures in Facts, Inc., had begun to be more interested either in defending or in spending their fortunes than in further augmenting them. But the day when they would be vulnerable was still some years away. Meanwhile they got on very well without the founder because they no longer needed a hand at the helm. Their course was set and any able-bodied seaman could watch the compass in the wheelhouse.

When Sturges finally cabled Falkenstall that he and Letia were on their way back, their lawyer was in Chicago on business of his own. Thus he was not present for the great homecoming, nor did he attempt to hurry back because he had no business of moment to transact with either of the Stronges. He did, however, recall the heavy emotional content of his last talk with Sturges—and his conversation with Orlando Hicks at the airport—so he began to be curious about what had taken place between Sturges and Letia during the year they had been away.

Falkenstall had had only a few letters from Sturges, a few notes from Letia. Sturges' letters had talked exclusively of the ideal life they had apparently been living on a *fazenda* in the state of São Paulo, near the mouth of the estuary that leads from the Atlantic to the coffee port of Santos. Sturges had told him of the skeet shoot they had had built, of the riding horses that had been flown them from the Argentine. They had made a chartered seaplane part of their permanent establishment and, when it was fun, they would fly to Rio to visit night clubs and to go to parties. They kept a suite in the Copacabana Palace Hotel in Rio so as not to be bothered with making arrangements when they felt like staying there a few days.

Letia's communications were mostly concerned with advising Falkenstall on the management of her estate. Neither Letia nor Sturges had said anything personal to him about how they felt about each other, but that did not surprise Falkenstall because they would have no particular reason to confide in him by mail. From what they said, they seemed to have made many new friends.

Thinking about them, Falkenstall concluded that if they had recaptured the feeling they had once had for each other, there would be plenty of work for him to do. It was inevitable that the combination would result in their embarking on a succession of new enterprises. They were both such dynamic

people that they would want new worlds to conquer. He rather thought that Sturges would be drawn at last into politics, with the hold of the New Deal broken and the struggle for power among the Republicans begun. Sturges would now be in a position to speak with an authoritative voice, for the backing of his magazines could well be a deciding factor in the careers of any one of the aspirants to succeed Truman.

Letia would be magnificent in the role of wife of an active political figure. It would use all her talents, manipulating the forces in a national political party.

Falkenstall thought that with Letia on his team, Sturges might well even aspire to the presidency himself. There would be a lot of things against him—his money, for one thing, his divorce for another. But it was quite possible that the country was now in a frame of mind to tolerate the divorce, and to accept the political leadership of a self-made tycoon. Personally, Sturges was not unprepossessing, and certainly he had a better speaking voice than Taft.

All in all, the more Falkenstall thought of it, the less interested he was in hastening home to Sturges' side because he felt he was getting on himself now and he did not relish being drawn into the struggle for power which Sturges' emergence as a national leader would entail. Yet obviously he could not avoid the responsibility because too much of his professional standing was dependent on his being the Strong's attorney, and although he was making more money than ever before, what with the wartime income taxes, he did not feel far enough ahead of the game to retire. Falkenstall saw that whatever battle they chose to fight, it was he who would have to manage the Strong's campaign, to pick up the pieces in their turbulent wake.

Finally his business was done and he no longer had any excuse not to face whatever came next. Besides, Sturges had telephoned and wired half a dozen inquiries already and Letia had written finding fault with the lawyer he had left in charge of her affairs. He took the Twentieth Century back to New York.

Sturges and Letia were in residence in the Park Avenue duplex, and Falkenstall's worst apprehensions seemed to be confirmed when they asked him to dine alone with them there on the night of his return.

It was a very gay dinner. Letia looked lovelier than ever

and Sturges was still tanned from the outdoor part of his life on the other continent. They were full of what a wonderful place it was and Sturges boasted of all his new accomplishments—with a 12-gauge shotgun, as a horseman, and as a convert to the conga. Letia, too, was bubbling over, but mostly she asked questions about the state of the nation and why the Republicans hadn't already begun to use their new power to put a halt to the fantastic taxation that was the combined result of the war piled on ten years of New Deal mismanagement.

Midway in the meal, Falkenstall found that he was puzzled by the fact that they were taking so long about getting to the point of what they would do with their lives next. Sturges might have sashayed around, but it was not like Letia to be so vague.

After dinner Sturges said, "We decided not to get any tickets to the theater because we thought it would be nice to spend an evening with you alone. We want to catch up on all the gossip."

Falkenstall did his best to supply the demand, but neither of them seemed really interested.

Finally Letia said, "Jim, would you mind awfully if I left you two alone? Miss Watson's waiting for me upstairs. I had her come back because I have so many letters to write. I'm trying to make some sense about what Dewey's doing and there are lots of people I want to ask about things."

When Falkenstall was alone with Sturges, the latter said, "That's her new hobby—since she got back. I didn't know she gave a damn about politics, but she met some senators who came down when we were there and now you'd think she was running the whole Republican party." He smiled tolerantly. "What do you think about it, Jim? It's a kind of a dirty business, politics."

Falkenstall looked at his client reflectively. He decided the time had come to ask the score. He said, "What about yourself, Sturges?"

"What do you mean, what about me?"

"I guess I mean what about you and Letia."

Sturges seemed mildly surprised.

"We're all right," he said. "Why do you ask?" His expression was bland and undisturbed.

"Well, damn it, Sturges, don't look at me as if I were an

idiot. The last time you and I had a talk you were full of what going away with Letia for a year was going to mean to you. You were even going to pull out of Facts, Inc., if you had to, to be happy with her."

"Oh, that," said Sturges. "Sure, of course, I remember. You know, Jim, it's a funny thing about that. I don't know what got into me that night with you."

"All that time you spent down there—what did you find out about each other?"

"That's what I mean that's funny about the whole thing," said Sturges. Now he seemed puzzled himself.

"You know, it seemed to mean so much to me then," he went on, "but after we got down there, I just never got around to talking about ourselves to Letia. The time just went by and it never came up."

"That's not possible!" said Falkenstall. "You can't spend a year with a woman you're in love with and never talk about yourselves."

"You can, too," said Sturges stoutly. "The days just go by. At first you think you'll talk next week. It all comes back to me now. I remember when we got down there I thought, 'Well, there's no use talking until we get settled,' and then after we got settled there were always things to do. And at night we both always seemed to be tired from it all. So help me God, Jim, the time just went by." He had risen and the memory of his earlier anxiety seemed to impel him to walk up and down the big drawing room in which they sat.

The lawyer said, "And what about Letia? What did she think?"

"Well, I don't know," said Sturges. "She never really said. She seemed to be having a good-enough time. She used to ask me sometimes what I was going to do when I got back to New York, but hell, I didn't know, Jim, and she never pressed the question. Now that you bring it up, it really is amazing how you can go away just to think something out and never think about it at all."

"Well, what are you going to do now?" said Falkenstall.

"Who, me?" asked Sturges. "Oh, I spend most of my time at *Facts*. Letia's gotten awfully busy about this political thing since she got back and I don't like to bother her when she gets interested in something. As a matter of fact, what I'm doing now is editing *The Weekly*. There are a lot of little

things about it I'd like to fix. Letia's going out West to meet some of the chairmen on the Coast next week and I'll have all my time to devote to it. It's funny that we never did get to talk about things. I'd probably have never thought about it if you hadn't brought it up. But you're right that it's funny."

He paused, standing by one of the long tables in the center of the drawing room, standing in silhouette against the soft light from a lamp on the table. Falkenstall saw that although he had been outdoors enough to be tanned, Sturges had taken on a lot of weight while he had been away. The lawyer also noted that the publisher's hair was quite gray now. There were no lines of youth about his well-cut clothes and he looked what he was, a very rich man, prematurely past middle age.

"If there's nothing else you want of me," said the lawyer, "I think I'll be on my way, Sturges."

Falkenstall and Hicks never had the talk they had promised each other after they had seen the Strongs off to South America. Unlike Falkenstall, however, Hicks did not have to ask his client what had happened during the intervening year.

Hicks had acquired a taste for Washington when he had been in the Army, and he had opened a new public relations office there soon after he was demobilized. He had moved in high-enough military circles during the war to make his acquaintanceships useful if he represented some of the firms with whom the Army and the Navy continued to do business. Officially he was a press agent again, but actually the fees he earned were for lobbying—for getting the right point of view before the right individuals privately. Traveling about the world with Letia, he had seen enough of it to convince him that America's military appropriations would not be cut this time as they had been after the First World War.

In his new capacity, Orlando began to cultivate the most important committee chairmen in both houses. It was a pleasant surprise to him when some of his new friends told him that they had seen Letia and Sturges in Rio.

"Now, there's a girl for you," one of the senators said at lunch. "Smart as a steel trap. We saw a lot of her and you have no idea how quickly she caught on to things."

Orlando beamed.

"She's coming back in a month, you know—and we're going

to put her right to work if we can. These publishers' wives—when they're as good-looking as Clare and Letia! They never should have let Clare Luce tie herself down to a seat in Congress. We won't make the mistake of running Letia for office. With her husband's magazines behind her, we've got plenty for her to do on the National Committee."

"Did you talk to her about it?" asked Orlando.

"We certainly did," said the senator. "We certainly did. There's a girl who makes sense for you."

"I know," said Orlando happily.

"Of course you do," said the senator. "I'd forgotten you're *the* Colonel Hicks, aren't you?—the one who went all over the world with her? As a matter of fact, she talked about you when she was ~~telling~~ us about some of her trips."

"How's Sturges?" Orlando asked.

"He's a nice fellow," said the senator. "Has sound ideas. But he seems to care more for skeet shooting than politics these days."

With these fragments of information, Orlando had all he needed to know.

Once or twice, before Letia's actual return, he recalled his conversation with Falkenstall and chuckled to himself, "These lawyers, what do they know about people? So his man Sturges was going to put my gal where she belonged, eh?"

Orlando was as happy for Letia as he had been the day she had told him she was no longer in love with Joe Rogers and was going to marry Randolph Phelps after all. But this time it was much better. He thought to himself, "It could happen twice to her—hell, it did—but it won't happen a third time."

He was serene in the knowledge that his general would always be a general now and that she would never again waste herself on men who weren't worth her spending an evening with. Maybe it would be politics, as the senator thought, and maybe it wouldn't; but whatever Letia did with her life from now on, it would be she who called the tune. Hicks thought that life would again make some sense to him, dancing to it and watching others dance. He had had a bellyful of generals with stars on their collars during the war. By and large they had fallen a long way short of living up to his early speculations on what a general should be like, all the generals in the

world, all except his own Letia, who had told them how to win their war.

There had been only one threat to Letia's going on being the general he loved best, and now he was quite certain that threat was gone forever. She would never revert to being a woman again.

**THE END**















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